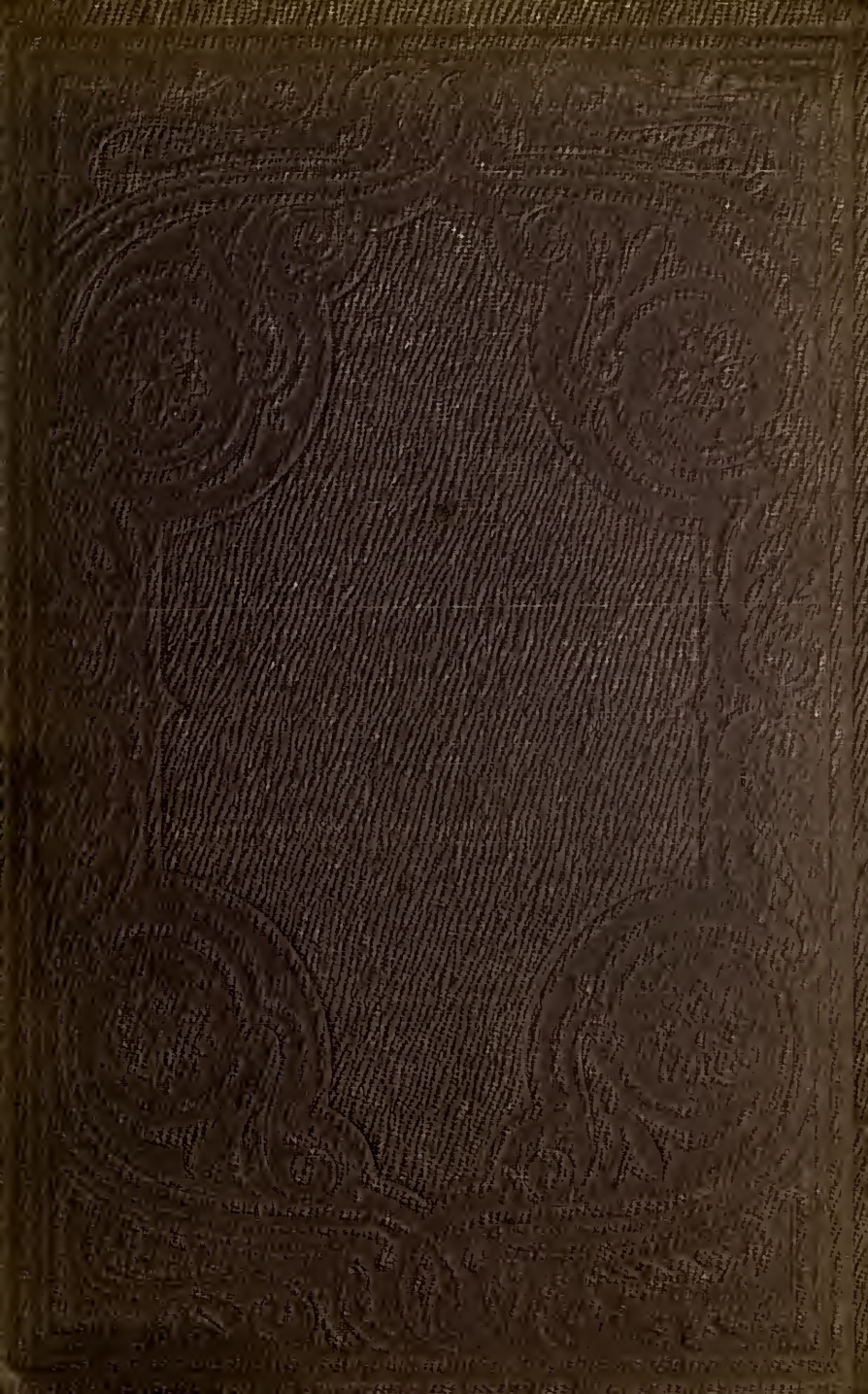

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THE RETURN.

Vol. III., p. 267.

THE WOOD-RANGERS.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF LUIS DE BELLEMARE.)

BY

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&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE WOOD-RANGERS.

CHAPTER I.

A FEAT OF HERCULEAN STRENGTH.

Let us now glance at the spot occupied by the Blackbird. The fires lighted on the banks threw at first so strong a light that nothing could escape the eyes of the Indians, and a sentinel placed near each fire was charged to observe carefully all that passed on the island. Seated, and leaning against the trunk of a tree, his broken shoulder bound up with strips of leather, the Blackbird only showed on his face an expression of satis-

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fied ferocity; as for the suffering he was undergoing, he would have thought it unworthy of him to betray the least indication of it. His ardent eye was fixed continually on the spot where were the three men, whom he pictured to himself as full of anguish.

But as the fog grew thicker, first the opposite bank, and then the island itself, became totally invisible. The Indian chief felt that it was necessary to redouble his surveillance. He ordered one man to cross the river, and another to walk along the bank, and exhorted every one to watchfulness.

"Go," said he, "and tell those of my warriors who are ordered to watch these Christians—whose skins and scalps shall serve as ornaments to our horses—that they must each have four ears, to replace the eyes that the fog has rendered useless. Tell them that their vigilance will merit their chief's gratitude

—but that if they allow sleep to deaden their senses, the hatchet of the Blackbird will send them to sleep in the land of spirits."

The two messengers set off, and soon returned to tell the chief that he might rest satisfied that attention would be paid to his orders. Indeed, stimulated at once by their own hatred of the whites and by the hope of a recompence—fearing if sleep surprised them, not so much the threatened punishment as the idea of awaking in the hunting grounds of the land of spirits, bearing on their foreheads the mark of shame which accompanies the sentinel who gives way to sleep—the sentinels had redoubled their vigilance. There are few sounds that can escape the marvellous ears of an Indian, but on this occasion the fog made it difficult to hear as well as to see, and the strictest attention was necessary. With closed eyes and open ears, and stand-

ing up to chase away the heaviness that the silence of nature caused them to feel, the Indian warriors stood motionless near their fires, throwing on from time to time some fagots to keep them ablaze.

Some time passed thus, during which the only sound heard was that of a distant fall in the river.

The Blackbird remained on the left bank, and the night air, as it inflamed his wounds, only excited his hatred the more. His face covered with hideous paint, and contracted by the pain—of which he disdained to make complaint—and his brilliant eyes, made him resemble one of the sanguinary idols of barbarous times. Little by little, however, in spite of himself, his eyes were weighed down by sleep, and an invincible drowsiness took possession of his spirit. Before long his sleep became so profound, that he did not

hear the dry branches crackle under a mocassin, as an Indian of his tribe advanced towards him.

Straight and motionless as a bamboo stem, an Indian runner, covered with blood and panting for breath, waited for some time until the chief, before whom he stood, should open his eyes and interrogate him. As the latter showed no signs of awaking, the runner resolved to announce his presence, and, in a hollow guttural voice, said—

"When the Blackbird shall open his eyes, he will hear from my mouth words which will chase sleep far from him."

The chief opened his eyes at the voice, and shook off his drowsiness with a violent effort. Ashamed at having been surprised asleep, he muttered:—

"The Blackbird has lost much blood: he has lost so much that the next sun will not

dry it on the ground, and his body is more feeble than his will."

"Man is made thus," replied the messenger, sententiously.

The Blackbird continued, without noticing the reflection:

"It is some very important message, doubtless, since the Spotted Cat has chosen the fleetest of his runners to carry it?"

"The Spotted Cat will send no more messengers," replied the Indian; "the lance of a white man has pierced his breast, and the chief now hunts with his fathers in the land of spirits."

"What matter? he died a conqueror? He saw, before he died, the white dogs dispersed over the plain?"

"He died conquered; and the Apaches had to fly, after losing their chief and fifty of their renowned warriors."

In spite of his wound, and of the empire that an Indian should exercise over himself, the Blackbird started up at these words. However, he restrained himself, and replied gravely, though with trembling lips—

"Who, then, sends you to me, messenger of ill?"

"The warriors, who want a chief to repair their defeat. The Blackbird was but the chief of a tribe; he is now the chief of a whole people."

Satisfied pride shone in the eye of the Indian, at his augmented authority.

"If the rifles of the north had been joined to ours, the whites of the south would have been conquered." But as he recalled to mind the insulting manner in which the two hunters had rejected his proposal, his eyes darted forth flames of hatred, and, pointing to his wound, he said, "What can a wounded chief

do? His limbs refuse to carry him, and he can scarcely sit on his horse."

"We can tie him on; a chief is at once a head and an arm—if the arm be powerful the head will act, and the sight of their chief's blood will animate our warriors. The council-fire was lighted anew after the defeat, and the warriors wait for the Blackbird to make his voice heard; his battle-horse is ready—let us go!"

"No," replied the Blackbird, "my warriors encompass, on each bank, the white hunters whom I wished to have for allies; now they are enemies; the ball of one of them has rendered useless, for six moons the arm that was so strong in combat; and were I offered the command of ten nations, I would refuse it, to await here the hour when the blood that I thirst for shall flow before my eyes."

The chief then recounted briefly the cap-

tivity of Gayferos, his deliverance by the Canadian, the rejection of his proposals, and the vow of vengeance he had made.

The messenger listened gravely; he felt all the importance of making a new attack on the gold-seekers, at the moment when, delighted at their victory, they believed themselves safe, and he proposed to the Blackbird to leave some one behind in his place to watch the island; but the Blackbird was immovable.

"Well!" said the runner, "before long the sun will begin to rise; I shall wait until daylight to report to the Apaches that the Blackbird prefers his personal vengeance to the honour of the entire nation. By deferring my departure, I shall have retarded the moment when our warriors will have to regret the loss of the bravest among them."

"So be it," said the chief in a grave tone, although much pleased by this adroit flattery;

"but a messenger has need of repose after a battle followed by a long journey. Meanwhile, I would listen to the account of the combat in which the Spotted Cat lost his life."

The messenger sat down near the fire, with crossed legs, and with one elbow on his knee and his head leaning on his hand; after a few minutes' rest, he gave a circumstantial account of the attack on the white camp—omitting no fact which might awaken the hatred of the Blackbird against the Mexican invaders.

This over, he lay down and slept, or seemed to sleep. But the tumultuous and contrary passions which struggled in the heart of the Blackbird—ambition on the one hand, and thirst for vengeance on the other—kept him awake without effort. In about an hour the runner half rose, and pushing back the cloak of skin which he had drawn over his head, he

perceived the Blackbird still sitting in the same attitude.

"The silence of the night has spoken to me," said he, "and I thought that a renowned chief like the Blackbird might, before the rising sun, have his enemies in his power, and hear their death song."

"My warriors cannot walk on the water as on the war-path," replied he; "the men of the north do not resemble those of the south, whose rifles are like reeds in their hands."

"The blood that the Blackbird has lost deceives his intellects and obscures his vision; if he will permit it, I shall act for him, and to-morrow his vengeance will be complete."

"Do as you like: from whatever side vengeance comes, it will be agreeable to me."

"Enough. I shall soon bring here the three hunters, and him whose scalp they could not save."

So saying, the messenger rose, and was soon hidden by the fog from the eyes of the Blackbird.

On the island more generous emotions were felt. From the eyes of its occupants sleep had also fled—for if there be a moment in life when the hearts of the bravest may fail them, it is when danger is terrible and inevitable, and when not even the last consolation of selling life dearly is possible to them. Watched by enemies whom they could not see, the hunters could not satisfy their rage by making their foes fall beneath their bullets, as they had done the evening before. Besides, Bois-Rose and Pepé knew too well the implacable obstinacy of the Indians to suppose that the Blackbird would permit his warriors to reply to their attacks—a soldier's death would have seemed too easy to him.

Oppressed by these sad thoughts, the three

hunters spoke no more, but resigned themselves to their fate, rather than abandon the unlucky stranger by attempting to escape.

Fabian was as determined to die as the others. The habitual sadness of his spirit robbed death of its terrors, but still the ardour of his mind would have caused him to prefer a quicker death, weapon in hand, to the slow and ignominious one reserved for them. He was the first to break silence. The profound tranquillity that reigned on the banks was to the experienced eyes of the Canadian and Pepé only a certain indication of the invincible resolution of their enemies; but to Fabian it appeared reassuring—a blessing by which they ought to profit.

"All sleeps now around us," said he; "not only the Indians on the banks, but all that has life in the woods and in the desert—the river itself seems to be running slower! See!

the reflections of the fires die away! Would it not be the time to attempt a descent upon the bank?"

"The Indians sleep!" interrupted Pepé, bitterly, "yes, like that water which seems stagnant, but none the less pursues its course. You could not take three steps in the river before the Indians would rush after you, as you have often seen wolves rush after a stag. Have *you* nothing better to propose, Bois-Rose?"

"No," replied he, as his hand sought that of Fabian, while with the other he pointed to the sick man, tossing restlessly on his couch of pain.

"But, in default of all other chance," said Fabian, "we should at least have that of dying with honour, side by side, as we would wish. If we are victorious, we can then return to the aid of this unfortunate man. If

we fall, God himself, when we appear before him, cannot reproach us with the sacrifice of his life, since we risked our own for the common good."

"No," replied Bois-Rose; "but let us still hope in that God who re-united us by a miracle; what does not happen to-day may to-morrow; we have time before us before our provisions fail. To attempt to take the bank now, would be to march to certain death. To die would be nothing, and we always hold that last resource in our own hands; but we might perhaps be made prisoners, and then I shudder to think of what would be our fate. Oh! my beloved Fabian, these Indians, in their determination to take us alive, give me at least the happiness of being yet a few days beside you."

Silence again resumed its reign; but as Bois-Rose thought of the terrible *denouement*,

he clutched convulsively at some of the trunks of the dead trees, and under his powerful grasp the islet trembled as though about to be torn from its base.

"Ah! the wretches! the demons!" cried Pepé, with a sudden explosion of rage. "Look yonder!"

A red light was piercing gradually through the veil of vapour which hung over the river, and seemed to advance and grow larger; but, strange to say, the fire floated on the water, and, intense as was the fog, the mass of flame dissipated it as the sun disperses the clouds. The three hunters had barely time to be astonished at this apparition, before they guessed its cause. A long course of life in the desert and its dangers had imparted to the Canadian a firmness which Pepé had not yet attained; therefore, instead of giving way to surprise, he remained perfectly calm.

He knew that this was the only way to surmount any difficulty.

"Yes," said he, "I understand what it is as well as if the Indians had told me. You spoke once of foxes smoked out of their holes; now they want to burn us in ours."

The globe of fire which floated on the river advanced with alarming rapidity, and confirmed the words of Bois-Rose. Already amidst the water, reddened by the flame, the twigs of the willows were becoming distinct.

"It is a fire-ship," cried Pepé, "with which they want to set fire to our island."

"So much the better," cried Fabian; "better to fight against fire than to wait quietly for death."

"Yes," said Bois-Rose, "but fire is a terrible adversary, and it fights for these demons."

The besieged could oppose nothing to the

advancing flames; and they would soon devour the little island, leaving to its inmates no other chance of escape but by throwing themselves into the water—where the Indians could either kill them by rifle-shots, or take them alive, as they pleased.

Such had been the idea of the Indian messenger. By his order, the Apaches had cut down a tree with its leaves on, and a thick mass of wet grass interlaced in its branches formed a sort of foundation on which they placed the branches of a pine-tree, and after setting fire to this construction, they had sent it floating down the stream. As it approached, the crackling of the wood could be heard, and out of the black smoke which mixed with the fog arose a bright clear flame.

Not far from the bank they could distinguish the form of an Indian. Pepé could not resist a sudden temptation. "Yon

demon," cried he, "shall at least not live to exult over our death."

So saying, he fired, and the plume of the Indian was seen to go down.

"Sad and tardy vengeance," remarked Bois-Rose; and as if, indeed, the Apaches disdained the efforts of a vanquished foe, the shore preserved its gloomy solitude, and not a single howl accompanied the last groans of the warrior.

"Never mind," cried Pepé, stamping his foot in his impotent fury; "I shall die the more calmly, the greater number of those demons I have sent before me." And he looked round for some other victim.

Meanwhile Bois-Rose was calmly reconnoitering the burning mass, which, if it touched the island, would soon set a light to the dried trees which composed it.

"Well," cried Pepé, whose rage blinded

his judgment, "it is useless to look at the fire; have you any method of making it deviate from its course?"

"Perhaps," replied the Canadian. Pepé began to whistle with an affected indifference.

"I see something that proves to me that the reasonings of the Indians are not always infallible; and if it were not that we shall receive a shower of balls, to force us to stay hidden while the islet takes fire, I should care as little for that burning raft as for a fire-fly in the air."

In constructing the floating fire, the Indians had calculated its thickness, so that the wet grass might be dried by the fire and become kindled about the time when it should touch the island. But the grass had been soaked in the water, and this had retarded its combustion; besides, the large branches had not

had time to inflame; it was only the smaller boughs and the leaves that were burning. This had not escaped the quick eye of the Canadian, who, advancing with a long stick in his hand, resolved to push it under water; but just as he was about to risk this attempt, what he had predicted took place. A shower of balls and arrows flew towards them, though these shots seemed rather intended to terrify than to kill them.

"They are determined," said Bois-Rose, "only to take us alive."

The fire almost touched the island—a few minutes and it would be alight, when, with the rapidity of lightning, Bois-Rose glided into the water and disappeared. Shouts arose from each side of the river when the Indians—as well as Fabian and Pepé—saw the floating tree tremble under his powerful grasp. The fire blazed up brightly for a mo-

ment, then the water hissed, and the mass of flame was extinguished in foam, until darkness and fog once more spread their sombre covering over the river. The blackened tree, turned from its course, passed by the island, while, amidst the howls of the Indians, Bois-Rose rejoined his friends. The whole island shook under his efforts to get back upon it.

"Howl at your ease," cried he, "you have not captured us yet; but," he added, in a more serious tone, "shall we be always as lucky?"

Indeed, although this danger was surmounted, how many remained to be conquered! Who could foresee what new stratagems the Indians might employ against them? These reflections damped their first feeling of triumph. All at once Pepé started up, crying out as he did so:—

"Bois-Rose, Fabian, we are saved!"

"Saved!" said Bois-Rose, "what do you mean?"

"Did you not remark how a few hours ago the whole island trembled under our hands when we tore away some branches to fortify ourselves with, and how you yourself made it shake just now? Well, I thought once of making a raft, but now I believe we three can uproot the whole island and set it floating. The fog is thick, the night dark, and to-morrow—"

"We shall be far from here!' cried Bois-Rose. "To work! to work! we have no time to spare, for the rising wind indicates the approach of morning, and the river does not run more than three knots an hour."

"So much the better, the movement will be less visible."

The brave Canadian grasped the hands of his comrades as he rose to his feet.

"What are you going to do?" said Fabian;

"cannot we three uproot the island, as Pepé said?"

"Doubtless, Fabian, but we risk breaking it in pieces, and our safety depends upon keeping it together. It is, perhaps, some large branch or root which holds it in its place. Many years must have elapsed since these trees were first driven here, and the water has probably rendered this branch or root very rotten—that is what I wish to find out."

At that moment the doleful screech of an owl interrupted them, and those plaintive cries, troubling the silence of night just as they were about to entertain some hope, sounded ominous in the ears of Pepé.

"Ah!" said he, sadly, all his superstition reviving, "the voice of the owl at this moment seems to me to announce no good fortune to us."

"The imitation is perfect, I allow," said

Bois-Rose, "but you must not be thus deceived. It is an Indian sentinel who calls to his companions, either to warn them to be watchful, or, what is more like their diabolical spirit, to remind us that they are watching us. It is a kind of death-song, with which they wish to regale us."

As he spoke, the same sound was repeated from the opposite bank with different modulations, confirming his words; but it sounded none the less terrible, as it revealed all the perils and ambushes hidden by the darkness of the night.

"I have a great mind to call to them to roar more like tigers that they are."

"Do not; it would only enable them to know our exact position."

So saying, the Canadian entered the water with extreme care, while his comrades followed his movements with anxious eyes.

"Well," said Pepè, when Bois-Rose came to the surface to take breath, "are we firmly fixed?"

"All is well, I think," replied Bois-Rose; "I see at present but one thing that keeps the islet at anchor. Have patience awhile."

"Take care not to get too far under," said Fabian, "or you may be caught in the roots and branches."

"Have no fear, child; a whale may sooner remain fixed to a fishing boat which it can toss twenty feet into the air, than I under an islet that I could break to pieces with a blow."

The river closed again over his head, and a tolerably long space of time elapsed, during which the presence of Bois-Rose was indicated only by the eddies formed round the islet, which now tottered on its foundation. His comrades felt that the giant was making a powerful effort, and Fabian's heart sank as he

thought that he might be struggling with death, when a crash was heard under their feet, like that of a ship's timbers striking against a rock, and Bois-Rose reappeared above the surface, his hair streaming with water. With one bound he regained the island, which began to move slowly down the river. An enormous root, some depth in the water, had given way to the vigorous strength of the Colossus, and the islet was set free.

"God be praised!" cried he, "the last obstacle is vanquished, and we are afloat." As he spoke, the island could be perceived advancing down the stream, slowly, it is true, but surely.

"Now," continued he, "our life rests in the hands of God. If the island floats down the middle of the stream, we shall soon, thanks to the fog, be out of sight or reach of the Indians. "Oh! my God," added he, fervently, "a few hours more of darkness, and your creatures will be saved."

CHAPTER II.

THE FLOATING ISLET.

THE three men kept silence as they followed with anxious eyes the movement of the floating island. Day would soon break, but the freshness of the night, which always increases an hour or two before sunrise, had condensed more and more the vapours which rose from the water. The fires on the bank appeared only like stars, which grow pale in the heavens at the approach of dawn. From this source, therefore, they had little to fear; but another

danger menaced the three hunters. The island followed the stream, but turned round as it went, and they feared that in this continual rotation it might deviate from the centre of the river, and strike on one of the banks on which the Indians were encamped.

Like the sailor who, with a heart full of anguish, follows the movements of his ship almost disabled by the storm, and contemplates with terror the breakers into which he is perhaps destined to be driven, thus the three hunters—a prey to the most cruel anxiety—regarded in silence the uncertain progress of their island. When sometimes the border of osiers and reeds which surrounded the island trembled in the breeze which proceeded from one of the banks, it seemed then to be driven towards the opposite side. Sometimes it went straight along with the current, but, in any event, the efforts of

those who were on it could do nothing to direct it. Luckily the fog was so thick that the very trees which bordered the river were invisible.

"Courage," muttered Pepé; "as long as we cannot see the trees, it is a sign that we are going on rightly. Ah! if God but favour us, many a howl will resound along these banks, now so peaceful, when at daybreak the Indians find neither the island nor those it sheltered."

"Yes," replied Bois-Rose, "it was a grand idea, Pepé; in the trouble of my mind I should not have thought of it, and yet it was such a simple thing."

"Simple ideas are always the last to present themselves," rejoined Pepé. "But do you know, Bois-Rose," added he, in a low voice, "it proves that in the desert it is imprudent to venture with one whom you love

more than life, since fear for him takes away a man's senses. I tell you frankly, Bois-Rosé, you have not been like yourself."

"It is true; I scarcely recognize myself," replied the Canadian simply; "and yet—"

He did not finish, but fell into a profound reverie, during which, like a man whose body only is present, and his soul absent, he appeared no longer to watch the movements of the island. For the hunter who during twenty years had lived the free life of the desert, to renounce this life seemed like death; but to renounce the society of Fabian, and the consolation of having his eyes closed by his adopted son, was still worse than death. Fabian and the desert were the two dominant affections of his life, and to abandon either seemed impossible.

His reverie, however, was soon interrupted by Pepé, who had for some minutes been

casting uneasy glances towards one of the banks. Through the fog he fancied he could perceive the fantastic forms which trees appear to take in a mist. They looked like indistinct phantoms, covered with long draperies, hanging over the river.

"We are going wrong, Bois-Rose," said he; "are not those the tops of the willows on the bank?"

"It is true," cried Bois-Rose, rousing himself; "and by the fires being still visible, it is evident how little progress we have made in the last half hour."

At that moment the island began to move more rapidly, and the trees became more distinct. The hunters looked anxiously at each other. One of the fires was now more clearly seen, and they could even distinguish an Indian sentinel in his frightful battle-costume. The long mane of a bison covered his head, and above

that waved a plume of feathers. Bois-Rose pointed him out to Pepé, but luckily the fog was so thick that the Indian, rendered visible himself by the fire, near which he stood, could not yet see the island. However, as if an instinct had warned him to be watchful, he raised his head and shook back the flowing hair which ornamented it.

"Can he have any suspicion?" said Bois-Rose.

"Ah! if a rifle made no more noise than an arrow, with what pleasure I should send that human buffalo to mount guard in another world," replied Pepé.

Just then they saw the Indian stick his lance in the ground, and, leaning forward, shade his eyes with his hands, so as to concentrate their power. A keen anxiety was in their hearts as they watched him. The

ferocious warrior, bending down like a wild beast ready to spring, his face half-covered with the straggling hair, was hideous and terrible to look upon; but the fugitives would only have laughed at the spectacle, had they not had so much to dread. All at once, the Apache, after remaining a few minutes in this attentive attitude, walked towards the bank and disappeared from sight—for nothing was visible except in the circle of light thrown by the fire. It was a moment of intense anxiety for the fugitives, as the island continued to glide silently on.

"Has he seen us?" murmured Pepé.

"I fear so."

A doleful cry now caused them to start. It was repeated from the opposite side; it was the signal of the sentinels one to the other, but all became again silent. Bois-Rose uttered a murmur of relief, as he saw the man return

to his former place and attitude. It was a false alarm.

Still the island continued to approach the bank.

"At this rate," said Bois-Rose, "in ten minutes we shall fall into the hands of the Indians. If we could but paddle a little with that great branch, we should soon be in the right direction again, but the noise, I fear, would betray us."

"Nevertheless," replied Pepé, "it is what we must do—it is better to run the chance of betraying ourselves, than be drifted into the hands of our enemies. But first, let us see if the current in which we now are runs towards the bank. If it does, we must hesitate no longer; and although the branch of a tree is more noisy in the water than an oar, we must do our best to paddle in silence."

Pepé then gently broke off a piece of wood

and placed it on the water, and, leaning over the edge, he and Bois-Rose watched it anxiously. There was in that place a violent eddy, caused by some deep hole in the bed of the river. For a moment the wood turned round as though going to sink; then it took a direction opposite to the bank, towards which they were driving. Both uttered a stifled exclamation of joy, as their island also, after a moment's stoppage, began to float away from the shore, and the increasing thickness of the fog assured them that they were taking the right course.

About an hour passed thus, amidst poignant alternatives of fear and hope; then the bivouac fires were lost in the distance, and the fugitives perceived that they were nearly out of danger. Reassured by this belief, Bois-Rose placed himself at one end of the islet, and paddled vigorously, until the

raft, ceasing to gyrate, advanced more swiftly down the current, like a horse long abandoned to his own caprices, who feels, at last, the hand and spur of an able rider. Keeping where the water was deepest, they now proceeded at a considerable rate of speed, and began to think themselves entirely out of danger.

"Daylight will not be long in appearing," said Bois-Rose, "and we must now land and endeavour to get on faster; we shall go twice as fast on foot as on this island, which sails slower than a Dutch lugger."

"Well! land where you like, Bois-Rose, and we will follow. Let us wade down the stream a bit, so as to hide our traces from the Indians; and even if we have to carry the wounded man, we can manage two leagues an hour. Do you think, Don Fabian, that the Golden Valley is far off?"

"You saw the sun go down behind the foggy mountains which shut in this valley," replied Fabian. "It lies at their foot—we cannot be many hours march from it."

Bois-Rose now gave to the island an oblique direction, and in about a quarter of an hour it struck violently against the bank. While Pepé and Fabian jumped ashore, the Canadian took the wounded man in his arms, and laid him gently down. This awoke him, and, opening his eyes and throwing round him an astonished glance, he murmured, "Virgen Santa! shall I again hear those frightful howls which troubled my sleep?"

"No, my lad, the Indians are far off now, and we are in safety. Thank God, who has permitted me to save all that are dear to me, my child Fabian and my old friend."

They then prepared to continue their course.

"If you are not able to walk," said Pepé to Gayferos, "we shall construct a kind of litter to carry you on. We have no time to lose if we wish to escape these wretches, who, as soon as daylight appears, will begin to chase us as eagerly as ever they chased a white enemy."

So great was the desire of Gayferos to escape, that he almost forgot the pain he was enduring, and, declaring that he would follow his liberators as quickly as they could go themselves, he begged them to set off at once.

"We have some precautions to take first," said Bois-Rose; "rest a few minutes while we break to pieces and commit to the current this raft which has been so useful to us. It is important that the Indians should not trace us."

All three set to work, and, already dis-

jointed by the breaking of the root which held it, and by the shock it had received on touching the shore, the floating island opposed no great resistance to their efforts. The trunks of the trees which composed it were torn asunder and pushed into the current, which carried them quickly away—and there soon remained no vestige of what it had taken years to construct. When the last branch had disappeared from their eyes, Bois-Rose and Pepé busied themselves in raising up the stalks of the plants, to efface the marks of their feet, and then all prepared to start. They first entered the water and walked along the edge, so as to leave no footmarks, and to lead the Indians to suppose that they had remained on the island. It was too fatiguing for them to walk very quickly; but, in about an hour, just as their wounded feet were about to force them to make halt, they arrived at the fork

of two rivers which formed a delta. In this delta lay the Golden Valley.

Daylight was just beginning to appear in the horizon, and a grey tint upon the sky was taking the place of darkness. Luckily the arm of the river that they had to cross was not deep, the mass of the water flowing in the opposite direction. This was fortunate, for the wounded man could not swim. Bois-Rose lifted him on his shoulders, and all three waded through the water, which scarcely reached to their knees. The chain of mountains was only about a league off, and after a short rest, all resumed their way with renewed ardour.

Soon the country changed its aspect. To the fine sand—for the triangle formed by the junction of the two rivers was inundated during part of the year—succeeded deep ruts, and then dry beds of streams, hollowed out by

the torrents in the rainy season. Instead of the narrow border of willows and cotton trees which shaded the deserted banks, green oaks rose up, and the landscape terminated in the line of the foggy mountains. All looked strange and imposing, and rarely had the foot of a white man pressed this desert clothed in its virgin wildness. Perhaps Marcos Arellanos and Cuchillo were the only white men who had ever wandered to this remote place. A vague sentiment of awe caused the hunters involuntarily to lower their voices before the supernatural charm of this austere landscape. Those hills enveloped in mist—even when the plains shone with the blazing rays of the sun —seemed to hide some impenetrable mystery. It might be fancied that the invisible guardians of the treasures, the lords of the mountains, according to Indian superstition, were hidden under this veil of eternal vapour.

CHAPTER III.

THE FINGER OF GOD.

After a short journey, fatigue and suffering overcame the wounded man; and as it was imperious that he should not become acquainted with the situation of the Golden Valley, or even be made aware of its existence, Bois-Rose and Pepé resolved, now that he was in safety, to leave him for some hours and employ the time in reconnoitering the places described to Fabian by his adoptive mother.

"Listen, my lad!" said Bois-Rose to

Gayferos, "we have given you quite sufficient proofs of devotion, and now we must leave you for half or perhaps a whole day. We have some business in hand which requires three determined men; if this evening, or to-morrow morning, we are still alive, you shall see us return; if not, you know it will not be our fault. Here is water and dried meat, and twenty-four hours will soon pass."

It was not without regret that Gayferos consented to this separation; however, reassured by a new promise from the generous hunters, to whom he owed so much, he resigned himself to being left behind.

"I have one last word to say to you," said Bois-Rose. "If chance bring here any of the companions from whom you so unluckily separated, I exact of you, as the sole return for the service which we have rendered to you, that you will reveal to none of them our pre-

sence here. As for your own, you can account for it in any way you like."

Gayferos made the required promise, and they then took leave of him.

On the point of accomplishing one of his most ardent desires, that of enriching the child of his affection, and adding immense treasures to his future fortune, Bois-Rose seemed to forget that it would raise an additional barrier between Fabian and himself.

Pepé, anxious to repair, as far as possible, the involuntary injury that he had caused to the Mediana family, walked along with an elastic step. Fabian alone did not seem happy, and after a quarter of an hour he stopped, saying that he needed rest. All three sat down on a little hillock, and Pepé, pointing to the mountains, cried, in a tone of gay reproach, "What! Don Fabian! does not the neighbourhood of those places so fer-

tile in gold give new vigour to your limbs?"

"No," replied Fabian, "for I shall not go a step further in that direction till sunrise."

"Ah," said Bois-Rose, "and why not?"

"Why? Because this is a cursed place—a place where he—whom before you I loved as a father—was assassinated; because a thousand dangers surround you, and I have already exposed you too much by making you espouse my cause."

"What are these dangers that we three together cannot brave? Can they be greater than what we have just passed through? And if it please Pepé and me to incur them for you, what then?"

"These dangers are of all kinds," replied Fabian; "why deceive oneself longer? Does not everything prove that Don Estevan knows also of the existence of the Golden Valley?"

"Well, and what do you conclude from that?"

"That three men cannot prevail against sixty."

"Listen, my child," replied Bois Rose with some impatience; "it was before engaging in this enterprise that we should have made these reflections; now they are too late. And why do you not think to-day as you did yesterday?"

"Because yesterday I was blinded by passion; because reflection has now taken its place; because I do not hope to-day what I hoped yesterday."

The contradictory passions which agitated his heart did not permit Fabian to explain more clearly to the Canadian the alternations of his wishes.

"Fabian," said Bois-Rose, solemnly, "you have a holy but terrible duty to perform, and duty must be done; but who tells you that the expedition commanded by Don Estevan

will take the same path as ourselves? And, if it does, so much the better: the murderer of your mother will fall into your hands."

"The guide conducting them," replied Fabian, seeking to hide his real sentiments, "can only be that miserable Cuchillo. Now, if I am not wrong, the valley must be known to him; in any case, we should await the return of daylight before entangling ourselves in a country we know nothing about, and in which these adventurers may prove enemies as formidable as the Indians. Do you not think so, Pepé?"

"Nearly all night the wind has brought to our ears," replied he, "the sound of firing, which proves that the troop has been engaged with the Indians; it is not therefore probable that any one can be in advance of us. I must say that my opinion is that we should, without loss of time, gain some place in the mountains

where we may engage in a last inevitable struggle with our enemies; some well-chosen spot, where we can defend ourselves with a chance of success."

"It is this unequal struggle that I wish to avoid," replied Fabian, warmly. "As long as I could hope to overtake, before they reached Tubac, those whom Providence seemed to point out for my vengeance, and attack them while they were only five against three, I pursued them without reflection; as long as I could believe that this expedition had, like so many others, entered the desert only in search of some unknown spot, I followed them. But what has happened? After four days in which we took a different path, do we not find them near these mountains? Their aim is therefore the same as ours. Three men cannot fight against sixty; therefore God forbid that, to further either my vengeance or my cupidity, I

should sacrifice two generous friends, whose lives are more precious to me than my own!"

"Child," said Bois-Rose, "do you not see that every one is here for himself, and yet that our three interests are but one? When, for the second time, God sent you to my arms, were we not already pursuing the man who was ruining your hopes, and had already assassinated your mother, and stolen your name? For ten years Pepé and I have been but one; the friends of one have been the friends of the other, and you are Pepé's son, because you are mine, Fabian, my child; and thanks be to God that in serving our own cause we are also serving yours. Whatever happens, then, we shall not take a step backwards."

"Besides," said Pepé, "do you count for nothing, Don Fabian, heaps of gold and a whole life of abundance for an imaginary peril? For, I repeat, we must reach the valley first,

and a day—an hour—in advance may enrich us for ever: you see, then, that *we* are egotists, trying to sacrifice *you* to our personal interest."

"Pepé is right," said Bois-Rose; "we want gold."

"What will you do with it?" asked Fabian, smiling.

"What shall I do with it? The child asks what I shall do with it?" cried Bois-Rose.

"Yes, I wish to know."

"What shall I do with it?" replied the honest Canadian, whom this question embarrassed much; "*parbleu!*—I will do—many things, I will give my rifle a golden barrel!" cried he, triumphantly.

Pepé smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You laugh," said Bois-Rose. "Do you think that when you finish off an Apache, a Sioux, or a Pawnee with a blow of your knife, it would not be grand to say to him, 'Dog, the

ball that broke your head came from a rifle of solid gold?' Few hunters can say as much."

"I agree to that," said Fabian; then he added, seriously, "No, my friends! Don Estevan escapes my vengeance, and the gold that I believed would be mine escapes me also, for it is surrounded by soldiers. What matters it? Have I not still, if I should become ambitious, the name and fortunes of my forefathers to reclaim? Are there not in Spain tribunals which dispense justice to all? God will do the rest, but I will not madly expose two noble lives. I do not speak of mine; young as I am, I have drunk the cup of bitterness to the dregs. You have done enough, and your generous subterfuges cannot impose upon me."

So saying, Fabian held out his hands to the two hunters, who pressed them in an affectionate grasp. The Canadian looked silently for a minute at the noble face of him

whom he was proud to call his son, and then said :—

"Fabian, my child, all my life has been passed on the sea or in deserts, but I have preserved sufficient remembrance of cities and their customs to know that justice is rather sold than given. This gold we shall employ in making of you what you were intended to be; this gold will smooth all the obstacles against which your rightful cause might break down. Pepé can tell you, like me, that we shall gladly expose our lives in the hope of restoring to you the property of your ancestors, and the illustrious name that you are so worthy to bear."

"Yes," said Pepé, "I have told you that the early part of my life was not such as I should wish. It was a little the fault of the Spanish Government, who never paid me for my services; still it is a weight upon my

heart. Often I think sadly of my past life; but God always pardons the repentant sinner, and gives him opportunity of repentance. That day has arrived; my pardon is near, and it is but justice that I should assist in restoring to you what I helped to take away."

"Let us go on, then!" said Bois-Rose. "God has hitherto shewn us our path, and will continue to aid us. If you stay, Fabian, we shall go alone."

So saying, the Canadian rose, and throwing his rifle over his shoulder began his march. Fabian was forced to yield, and all proceeded towards the mountains.

Daylight had not yet quite appeared, when a new actor advanced in his turn towards the same scenes. He came alone; his horse, in its impetuous course, made the sand fly under his feet; and the rider, who was no other than

Cuchillo, showed symptoms on his sinister countenance of some secret terror. His flight might not have been unobserved even in the tumult of action, or some of the Indians might have noticed his desertion, and hence his fears. But Cuchillo was not a man to undertake a bold stroke without calculating the chances. As the hunter, wishing to take the lion's whelps, throws him some bait to distract his attention, so Cuchillo had delivered to the lords of the desert his companions as a prey. He had calculated that the struggle would last a great part of the night, and that, conquered or conquering, the adventurers would not dare, during the following day, to leave their intrenchments. He would therefore have long hours before him in which to seize on some of the treasures of the Golden Valley, with which he would afterwards return to the protection of his

companions, and, when they all reached the place, he could still claim his share as soldier and as guide. Pretexts would not fail him for this second absence; but he had forgotten to calculate on Don Estevan's suspicions concerning him. To conclude his bargain with him, he had been forced to give such a precise account of the situation of the valley, that Don Estevan could scarcely miss the right road. After Cuchillo, followed by his horse, had glided out from the camp, he had ridden straight towards the mountains, and cupidity, the most blinding of passions, had closed his eyes to the danger of his plan.

His heart palpitating with alternate hopes and fears, he had advanced rapidly, and only stopped occasionally to listen to some vague murmurs of the desert. Then recognizing the groundlessness of his apprehensions, he had continued his road with renewed ardour.

Sometimes, also, the aspect of the places he had seen before awakened gloomy souvenirs. On that hillock he had rested with Marcos Arellanos; that nopal had furnished them with refreshing fruit; they had both contemplated with mysterious terror the strange aspect of the Misty Mountains, and his horse in its rapid course carried the murderer to the spot where his victim had fallen beneath his blows! Then to the fear of enemies succeeded that inspired by conscience, which, while it often sleeps by day, awakes and resumes its empire during the night. The bushes—the thorny nopals—rose before him like accusing phantoms, opposing his advance with extended arms; a cold perspiration stood on his brow; but cupidity, stronger than fear, spurred him on towards the valley, and he began to laugh at his own apprehensions.

"Phantoms," said he, "are like alcaldes,

who never address poor devils like me; but let me only get one or two arrobas of gold, and I shall have so many masses said for the soul of Arellanos that he will be glad to have met his death at such generous hands."

He laughed at this quaint conceit, and then rode on quickly. In a few minutes he stopped and listened again, but heard no noise save the loud breathing of his horse.

"I am alone," thought he; "those brutes whom I have guided are fighting to give me leisure to despoil the sands of some of that precious gold. Who is to prevent me presently, when daylight appears, from picking up as much as I can carry without betraying my secret? This time, it will not be as when along with Arellanos; I shall not have to fly from the Indians—they are busy. Afterwards I can come back with such of my companions as escape the Apaches. How many will re-

main to partake with me? Oh! the thought of these treasures makes the blood boil in my veins. Is it not gold that gives glory, pleasure, and every good of this world? Our priests say its power extends even beyond the tomb!"

While Cuchillo was advancing blindly to where his destiny led him, Don Estevan and Pedro Diaz were also on their way. Although the hills were but six leagues from the camp, yet, uncertain of the time of his return, Don Estevan had left orders to his people to await his return. The two advanced silently, full of desire for the gold, but equally desirous of intercepting the traitor. Two hours' quick riding had produced no result. Thanks to his advance, Cuchillo was invisible; and the darkness would have hidden his track even from the eyes of an Indian.

"There is no doubt," said Pedro Diaz,

breaking silence, "that the knave must have profited by the confusion to fly towards the valley, and seize on a part of the treasures which he has sold to us."

"That is not what I fear most," said Don Estevan. "If Cuchillo has not exaggerated the riches of the place, there will be plenty left for all of us. But now, so near attaining that for which I have crossed the desert—after having left a position envied by all, to brave the dangers of an expedition like this—a vague fear of failing agitates me. The desert is like the sea, abounding in pirates, and the soul of Cuchillo is full of treason; it seems to me that the villain will be fatal to us."

Suddenly Diaz dismounted, and picked up off the sand a dark object; it was a kind of valise, which Diaz at once recognized as belonging to Cuchillo.

"This shows you, Señor," said he, "that

we are in the right path, and that the coming day will bring us into the presence of a traitor."

"It shall then be his last treason," said Don Estevan; and they now rode silently on, with the certainty that Cuchillo was before them.

Strange chain of coincidences! When the sun appeared in the horizon, the different actors in this drama, apparently drawn together by accident, but in truth impelled onwards by the hand of God, had met in the most inaccessible part of the great American desert.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLDEN VALLEY.

THE darkness was no longer that of midnight —the outlines of the different objects began to be visible, and the peaks of the hills looked like domes or fantastic turrets in the half-light. Detached from the mass of the mountains, a rock in the form of a truncated cone towered up like an outwork. A cascade fell noisily from an adjacent hill into a deep gulph below, and in front of the rock a row of willows and cotton trees indicated the neighbourhood of a

stream. Then the immense plain of the delta, formed by the two arms of the Rio Gila (which from east to west cut for itself a double passage through the chain of the Misty Mountains), displayed itself in all its sombre majesty. Such were the striking points of the landscape which opened before the travellers.

Soon the blue light of morning replaced the darkness, and the summits of the hills one by one became visible. On the top of the rock two pines could now be seen, their bending stems and dark foliage extending over the abyss. At their foot the skeleton of a horse, held up by hidden fastenings, showed upon his whitened bones the savage ornaments with which he had been embellished, and fragments of the saddle still rested upon his back. The increasing light soon shone on more sinister emblems—on posts raised in different places,

and human scalps floating on them. These hideous trophies indicated the burial-place of an Indian warrior. In fact, a renowned chief reposed there; and his spirit overlooked, like the genius of plunder, those plains where his war-cry had so often resounded, and which he had ridden over on that battle-horse whose bones were whitening by his tomb. Birds of prey flew over his grave, uttering their shrill cries, as if they would awaken him who slept there for ever, and whose cold hand would no longer prepare for them their bloody feasts.

A few minutes later the horizon became tinted with pale rose-coloured clouds, and soon after, like the first spark of a fire, a ray of sun-light struck like a golden arrow on the thick fog, and floods of light inundated the depths of the valley. Day had come in all its glory, but wreaths of vapour still hung capriciously on the leaves of the trees, or clung

around the trunks. Soon were displayed wild precipices, with falls of water foaming down their sides; then deep defiles, at the entrance of which fantastic offerings of Indian superstition were suspended.

Above the tomb of the Indian chief rose the spray of the cascade, in which was reflected the colours of the rainbow; and lastly, a valley was visible, closed on one side by peaked rocks, from which hung long draperies of verdure, and on the other by a lake, whose waters were half hidden by the aquatic plants on its surface; this was the Golden Valley.

At the first glance the whole scene only offered the sombre features of a wild nature; but a scrutinizing eye would soon have divined the treasures concealed there. Nothing betrayed the presence of living things in that deserted place when the three hunters made their appearance on the spot.

"If the devil has an abode anywhere on the earth," said Pepé, pointing to the mountains, "it must surely be among those wild defiles."

"But if it be true," continued he, "that it is gold which is the cause of most crimes, it is more probable that the old fellow has chosen the Golden Valley for his abode, which contains, according to you, Don Fabian, enough to ruin an entire generation."

"You are right," said Fabian, who looked pale and grave; "it was here, perhaps, that the unlucky Marcos Arellanos was assassinated. Ah! if these places could speak, I should know the name of him whom I have sworn to pursue; but the wind and the rain have effaced the traces of the victim as well as those of the murderer."

"Patience, my child!" replied Bois-Rose; "I have never, in the course of a long life, known crime to go unpunished. Often we re-

cover the traces that were believed to have been long effaced, and even solitude sometimes raises its voice against the guilty. If the assassin be not dead, cupidity will doubtless bring him again to this place, and before long; for no doubt he is one of those in the Mexican camp. Now, Fabian, shall we wait for the enemy here, or shall we fill our pockets with gold and return?"

"I know not what to decide," replied Fabian; "I came here almost against my will. I obey your wishes, or else a will stronger than either yours or mine. I feel that an invisible hand impels me on—as it did on that evening when, scarcely knowing what I did, I came and sat down by your fire. Why should I, who do not know what to do with this gold, risk my life to obtain it? I know not. I know only that here I am, with a sad heart and a soul filled with cruel uncertainty."

"Man is but the plaything of Providence, it is true," said Bois-Rose; "but as for the sadness you feel, the aspect of these places sufficiently accounts for it; and as for——"

A hoarse cry, that scarcely appeared human, interrupted the Canadian. It seemed to come from the Indian tomb, as if it were an accusing voice against the invaders of this abode of the dead. The three hunters glanced simultaneously towards the tomb, but no living creature was visible there. The eye of one of the birds of prey that were sailing above the rock could alone have told where the cry came from. The imposing solemnity of the place, the bloody souvenirs evoked by it in Fabian's mind, and the superstitious ones in that of Pepé, joined to the strange and mysterious sound, inspired in both a feeling akin to terror. There was something so inexplicable in the sound, that for a moment they doubted having heard it.

"Is it really the voice of a man?" said Bois-Rose, "or only one of those singular echoes which resound in these mountains?"

"If it were a human voice," asked Fabian, "where did it come from? It seemed to be above us, and yet I see no one on the top of the hill."

"God send," said Pepé, crossing himself, "that in these mountains, which abound in inexplicable noises, and where lightning shines under a calm sky, we have only men to fight against! But if the fog contained a legion of devils—if the valley really contains, as you say, several years' income of the King of Spain, please, Señor Don Fabian, to recall your recollections, and tell us if we are still far off it."

Fabian threw a glance around him; the landscape was just what had been so minutely described to him.

"We must be close to the spot," said he, "for it should be at the foot of the tomb of the Indian chief—and these ornaments indicate that the rock is the tomb. We have no time to lose. You and Bois-Rose walk round the rock, while I go and examine those cotton trees and willows."

"I am suspicious of everything in this mysterious place," said Bois-Rose; "that cry indicated the presence of a human being; and whether white or red, he is to be feared. Before we separate, let me examine the *sign*."

All three bent on the ground eyes accustomed to read there as in an open book. The prints of a man's feet were visible on the sand, and one of them had trodden down the plants, whose stems were still gently rising up again one after the other.

"What did I tell you?" cried Bois-Rose. "Here are the tracks of a white man's feet,

and I swear it is not ten minutes since he was here. These footmarks lead towards yonder cotton trees."

"In any case he is alone," suggested Fabian.

All three were advancing towards the trees, when Bois-Rose halted.

"Let me go first," said he; "this hedge may hide the enemy. But no, the man who has left these foot-prints has only pulled open the vines and glanced through—he has not gone farther in that direction."

So saying, Bois-Rose, in his turn, pulled aside the branches and the climbing net-work which was interwoven with them, and after a short examination, which had no particular result, he retired and left the branches to reclose of themselves. He then tried to follow the tracks, but farther on the ground became stony, and all traces disappeared.

"Let us go round this conical rock," suggested Bois-Rose. "Come, Pepé; Fabian will wait here for us."

The two hunters strode off, and Fabian remained alone and pensive. This Golden Valley, of whose possession he had dreamt at that time when his heart nourished sweet hopes, was now near to him. What had been a dream was now a reality, and still he was more unhappy than at the time when hopeful love caused him to scoff at poverty. It is thus that happiness flies just as we are about to seize it. Sometimes, in the silence of the forest, the traveller lends a greedy ear to the notes of the mocking-bird, and advances with precaution towards the place where, hidden under the foliage, the bird of the solitudes utters its sweet song. Vain hope! he advances, and the singer flies, his voice still as distant and himself as invisible as ever! Thus

man often hears in the distance voices which sing to him of happiness; seduced by their charm, he rushes toward them; but they fly at his approach—and his whole life is spent in pursuing, without ever reaching, the happiness promised by these delusive sounds.

For Fabian, happiness lay no longer in the Golden Valley. It existed nowhere. No voice now sang for him; he had no aim to pursue; no flying but charming image which he hoped to overtake; he was in one of those moods that God in his mercy makes rare in our lives—during which all is dark, as when at sea the light that guides the sailor becomes suddenly obscured.

He advanced mechanically towards the thick row of trees that formed an almost impenetrable hedge before him, but scarcely had he made a passage for himself, when he stopped, motionless with surprise. The sun-

light shone on the stones, thick as those on a beach, and discovered innumerable glancing objects. Any other than a gold-seeker might have been deceived by these stones, which looked like vitrifications at the foot of a volcano; but the practised eye of Fabian instantly recognized the virgin gold under its clayey envelope, as it is brought down by the torrents from the gold-producing mountains. Before his eyes lay the richest treasure that was ever displayed to the view of man.

If the breeze could have brought to the ears of the young Count of Mediana the accents of Rosarita's voice, when she recalled him back to the hacienda, he would gladly have quitted all these treasures to run towards her. But the breeze was mute, and there is in gold so irresistible an attraction that Fabian, in spite of his sadness, was for the moment fascinated.

However, the soul of Fabian was not one to be intoxicated by success; and after a few minutes of this enthusiasm, he called his two companions. They came at his call.

"Have you found him?" said Pepé.

"The treasure, but not the man. See!" added he, pushing aside the trees.

"What! those shining stones!"

"Are pure gold—treasures which God has hidden during centuries."

"My God!" exclaimed Pepé.

And with ardent eyes fixed upon the mass of riches before him, the ex-carabinier fell upon his knees. Passions long kept under seemed to rush back into his heart; a complete transformation took place in him, and the sinister expression of his face recalled to mind the hour of crime when, twenty years before, he had bargained for the price of blood.

"Now," said Fabian, looking sadly at the

gold, as he thought that all these riches were not worth to him a smile or look from her who had disdained him, "I understand how these two rivers, in their annual rise, and by the torrents that descend from the Misty Mountains, covering this narrow valley, bring down gold with them; the position of this valley is perhaps unique in the world."

But the Spaniard heard him not. Riches, which the rough lesson he had received, and the life of independence and savage happiness he had enjoyed, had taught him during the last ten years to disdain, suddenly resumed their terrible influence over his soul.

"You could not have imagined, could you, Pepé," continued Fabian, "that so much gold could be collected in one place? Even I, who have been so long a gold-seeker, could not have imagined it, after all I had heard."

Pepé did not reply; his eye wandered

eagerly over the blocks of gold, and cast a sinister glance on Fabian and on Bois-Rose. The latter, standing in his favourite attitude, his arm resting on his rifle, amidst all these treasures, looked only at what was dearest to him—the young man restored to him by heaven. Pepé had before him, on one side, his old companion in danger—in a hundred different battles they had uttered their war-cry together, like those brothers in arms, in ancient chivalric times, who fought always under the same banner—who shared cold, hunger, and thirst together. On the other side, the young man, partly orphaned by his crime—a crime which had occasioned him remorse through so many years—the love and sole thought of his only friend in the world; and the demon of cupidity at his heart effaced all these souvenirs, and he already began to think these two men *de trop*.

A shudder passed through his frame as these thoughts crossed his mind. A struggle took place within him, a struggle of the feelings of youth with the more noble ones developed by the life of nature, where man seems brought near to God; but this struggle, though sharp, was short—the old outlaw disappeared, and there remained only the man purified by repentance and solitude. Still kneeling on the ground, Pepé had closed his eyes, and a furtive tear, unperceived by his companions, stole from his eyes, and rolled down his bronzed cheeks.

"Señor Don Fabian de Mediana!" cried he, starting up, "you are now a rich and powerful lord, for all this gold belongs to you alone."

So saying, he advanced and bowed respectfully to Fabian, who appeared somewhat surprised by the manner of his salutation.

"God forbid," cried Fabian, "that you who have shared the peril should not share the treasure. What do you say, Bois-Rose?—do you not rejoice to become in your old age rich and powerful?"

But Bois-Rose, unmoved before all the riches, contented himself with shaking his head, while a smile of tenderness for Fabian testified to the only interest that he took in that marvellous spectacle!

"I think like Pepé," said he, after a pause; "what could I do with this gold that the world covets? If it has for us an inestimable value, it is because it is to belong to you; the possession of the least of these stones would take away, in our eyes, from the value of the service we have rendered you. But the time for action has arrived; for certainly we are not alone in these solitudes."

Pepé now began to pull aside the branches;

but scarcely had he entered the valley, when the sound of a gun was distinctly heard. In a moment his voice reassured his anxious comrades."

"It is the devil," cried he, "forbidding us to encroach on his domains; but at all events, it is a devil whose aim is not infallible."

Before entering the valley, Bois-Rose and Fabian raised their eyes to the top of the hills whence the shot as well as the voice had proceeded. But the remains of the fog at that moment covered the top of the rock, and all three rushed simultaneously towards the isolated rock where they believed their enemy to be hidden. The sides, although steep, were covered with brushwood, which made them easy to climb, but it was a dangerous attempt, for the fog prevented them from seeing what enemies were there. Fabian wished to go first, but the vigorous arm of the

Canadian held him back, and meanwhile Pepé was half-way up the rock. Bois-Rose followed, begging Fabian to keep behind him.

Pepé mounted boldly, undismayed by the foes that might be concealed behind that mass of vapour, and soon disappeared under the mist. A cry of triumph soon warned his friends that he had arrived in safety. Both hastened to join him, but found no one on the rock except Pepé himself! Just as, disappointed at their want of success, they were preparing to descend again, a sudden gust of wind drove off the fog, and allowed them to see to a distance. To the right and left the plain presented the most complete picture of the desert in its dreary sadness. They beheld arid steppes, over which whirled clouds of sand, a burnt and sterile ground, everywhere silence, everywhere solitude. At some distance off two men on horseback were seen advancing

towards the rock, but at the distance at which they were, it was impossible to distinguish either their dress or the colour of their skin.

"Must we sustain a new siege here?" said Bois-Rose. "Are these white men or Indians?"

"White or red, they are enemies," said Pepé.

While the three friends bent down, so as not to be observed, a man, until then invisible, cautiously entered the lake. He lifted with care the floating leaves of the water-lilies, and forming of them a shelter over his head, remained motionless, and the surface of the lake soon after appeared as if undisturbed. This man was Cuchillo, the jackal, who, led by his evil destiny, had ventured to hunt on the ground of the lion.

CHAPTER V.

THE PUNISHMENT OF TANTALUS.

CUCHILLO, after reaching the mountains, had halted. He had not forgotten the appearance of the place, and his heart trembled with fear and joy. After a few minutes he looked around him more calmly. It was then dark, and when he arrived at the rock, the damp vapours from the lake enveloped with a thick veil both the valley and the tomb. The sound of the waterfall put an end to his uncer-

tainties; he remembered that it fell into a gulf close by the golden placer.

He had dismounted his horse, and sat down to wait for daylight; but scarcely had he done so, when he bounded up as though bitten by a serpent. A fatal chance had led him to sit down on the very spot where he had struck Marcos Arellanos, and quick as lightning every detail of the mortal struggle passed through his mind. However, this feeling of terror was of short duration.

In that part of America, superstition has not established its empire as in the old countries of Europe, where the evening mists give to objects fantastic aspects, and tend naturally to reflections upon the supernatural. From this arises the sombre poesy of the north, which, has peopled our land with ghosts and phantoms. In the American solitudes people fear the living more than the dead, and Cuchillo

had too much to fear from men to waste many thoughts upon the ghost of Arellanos, and he had soon quite banished the thought from his mind.

Although he felt nearly certain that no one had seen him leave the camp, or had followed him, he resolved to climb the rock and look out over the desert. The two pines, whose sombre verdure crowned the summit, appeared marvellously fit to shelter him from the eyes of the Indians, should any be near. As he advanced, however, he could not resist taking a glance at the valley; for a sudden fear took possession of his mind—was it still untouched as he had left it?

One glance reassured him. Nothing was changed in the valley; there were still the heaps of the shining metal.

The traveller, devoured with thirst in the sandy desert, does not more gladly catch sight of

the oasis at whose waters he desires to drink, than did Cuchillo at sight of the gold gleaming through the leaves of the trees.

Any other man would have hastened to seize as much of it as he could carry, and make off with his booty. But with Cuchillo cupidity was a passion carried to its utmost limits; and before seizing it the outlaw wished to feast his eyes on the treasure of which he had dreamed for two years, and for which he would not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of all his companions. After some moments of ecstatic contemplation, Cuchillo led his horse forward by the bridle, and having tied him to a tree, in a defile where the animal would be hidden from all eyes, he himself mounted the rock.

Arrived there, he looked around to assure himself that he was alone. He was soon satisfied, for at that moment neither of the other two parties was visible. Assured by the

silence that reigned around, he looked towards the cascade. The water, which seemed as it fell to form a curve of running silver, opened at one place, and displayed a block of gold sparkling in the rays of the sun. The most enormous cocoa nut that ever hung on a tree did not surpass this block in size. Continually washed by the spray of the cascade, this gold appeared in all its brilliance, as if ready to escape from the silica which held it; and thus perhaps for centuries this king's ransom had hung menacingly over the abyss!

At the sight of this block, which looked as though it might be seized by stretching out his hands, a thrill of joy passed through Cuchillo's heart; and, hanging over the precipice with extended arms, he gave utterance to the cry which had been heard by the three hunters below.

Soon, however, a spectacle that Cuchillo

was far from expecting to witness drew from him another cry, but this time of rage. He had seen a man, possessor like himself of the secret of the valley, treading with profane foot on the treasure that he had believed wholly his. Bois-Rose and Fabian were hidden behind the trees; and thinking that Pepé was alone, Cuchillo had fired at him without taking time for a proper aim; and thus Pepé had escaped the ball that whistled past him.

It would be impossible to paint his rage and stupefaction, when, hidden behind the pine trees, he saw two men join Pepé, especially when in one of them he recognized the terrible hunter whom he had seen engaged with the tigers at Poza, and in the other, Fabian, who had twice escaped his vengeance. A mortal fear chilled his heart; he almost fell to the ground. Must he again fly from the Golden Valley, from which fate seemed always to drive him?

Luckily for Cuchillo, the fog had hidden him from his enemies, and by the time they had reached the top he had descended on the opposite side—after having just caught a glance of Don Estevan and his companion in the distance. Here was a fresh subject of fear and surprise for Cuchillo, who, gliding like a serpent along the rocks, hid himself, as we have seen, amid the leaves of the water-lilies, to await the *denouement* of this strange adventure. Hidden from all eyes, he held himself in readiness to profit by the approaching conflict between Don Estevan and Fabian, and a shudder of diabolical joy mingled with that caused by the gold; he was like the rapacious bird which awaits the issue of the battle to seize upon its prey. If the three hunters were victorious, he had little, he thought, to fear from Fabian, who was still in his eyes Tiburcio Arellanos. The lower class of Mexicans think little of a

blow with the dagger, and he hoped that the one he had given might be pardoned, if he were to throw the blame upon Don Estevan. If this last remained master of the field, he trusted to find some plausible excuse for his desertion. He decided, therefore, upon letting them begin the struggle, and then, at the decisive moment, he should come to the assistance of the strongest.

While Cuchillo was endeavouring to console himself by these reasonings, Bois-Rose was able to distinguish the complexion of the new comers.

"They are from the Mexican camp," said he.

"I foresaw," said Fabian, "that we should have the whole troop on our hands, and be caught like wild horses in a stockade."

"Hush!" said Bois-Rose, "and trust to me to protect you. Nothing yet shows that

there are any others behind, and in any case we could not be better placed than on this rock; from here we might defy a whole tribe of savages. Besides, we do not yet know that they will stop here. Both of you crouch down —I shall watch them."

So saying, he lay flat down, hiding his head behind the stones which surrounded the top like turrets, but without losing sight of the horsemen. They began now to hear the sound of the horses' feet on the plain. The old hunter saw them stop and converse, but could not hear what they were saying.

"Why this halt, Diaz?" said Don Estevan, impatiently, "we have lost time enough already."

Prudence exacts that we should look about us before proceeding. The knave may be hidden about here, as we have tracked him up to the rock; he may not be alone, and we have everything to fear from him."

Don Estevan made a gesture of disdain.

"Ah!" said Bois-Rose, in a low voice, "I recognize Don Estevan, or rather Don Antonio de Mediana, who is at last in our power."

"Don Antonio de Mediana! Is it possible? Are you sure?" cried Fabian.

"It is he, I tell you."

"Ah! now I see that it was the hand of God which brought me here. Shade of my mother, rejoice!" cried Fabian.

Pepé kept silence, but at the name of Don Antonio hatred shone also in his glance. He raised his head, and his eye seemed to measure the distance between him and the object of his vengeance, but even the long rifle of Bois-Rose could scarcely reach them at such a range.

"Do not rise up, Pepé!" cautioned the Canadian; "you will be seen."

"Do you observe any others behind?" inquired Fabian.

"No one; from the point where the river divides to this place I see no living being; if," added he, after an instant's pause, "that black mass that I see floating on the river be only the trunk of a tree—but, at any rate, it is floating away from us."

"Never mind that," said Fabian; "describe to me the man who accompanies Don Antonio, perhaps I shall recognize him."

"He is tall and straight as a cane; and what a beautiful horse he rides!"

"A bay horse?—and has he gold lace on his hat, and a fine face?"

"Precisely."

"It is Pedro Diaz. Now, it would be cowardice not to show ourselves, when heaven sends us Don Antonio almost alone."

"Patience," said Pepé; "I am as interested as you are in not letting him escape, but haste may ruin all. When one has waited for

twenty years, one may easily wait a few minutes longer. Are you sure they are alone, Bois-Rose?"

"The sand whirls down there, but it is only the wind that is stirring it. They are alone, and now they stop and look about them."

So saying, Bois-Rose rose slowly, like the eagle who agitates before completely unfolding his wings—those powerful wings, the rapid flight of which will soon bring him down to the plain.

"Señor Don Estevan," said Pedro Diaz, "I think we should return to the camp."

Don Antonio hesitated a moment. The counsel was good, but it was too late to follow it.

From the top of the rock the three hunters watched their every movement.

"It is time," said Bois-Rose.

"I must take Don Antonio alive," said

Fabian. "Arrange that, and I care for nothing else."

Bois-Rose now rose to his full height, and uttered a cry which struck on the ears of the new comers. They uttered an exclamation of surprise, which surprise was still further increased at sight of the gigantic Canadian upon the rock.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" cried a voice, which Fabian recognized as that of Don Antonio.

"I shall tell you," replied the hunter; "it will recall to you a truth—never contested either in my country or in the desert—that the ground belongs to the first occupants: we were here before you, and are the sole masters of this place. We therefore wish one of you to retire with a good grace, and the other to surrender himself, that we may teach him a second law of the desert, 'blood for blood.'"

"It is some anchorite, whose brain is turned by solitude," said Pedro Diaz; "I shall terminate the conference with a bullet from my rifle."

"No!" cried Don Estevan, stopping him, "let us see first how far this folly will go. And which of us is it, friend," continued he, with an ironical air, "to whom you wish to teach this law?"

"To you," cried Fabian, rising.

"What! you here!" cried Don Estevan, with mingled rage and surprise.

Fabian bowed.

"And here am I, who have been following you for the last fortnight," said Pepé, "and who thanks God for the opportunity of paying off a debt of twenty years' standing."

"Who are you?" asked Don Estevan, trying to remember who it was, for years and difference of costume had altered the aspect of the old coast-guardsman.

"Pepé the Sleeper, who has not forgotten his residence at Ceuta."

At this name, which explained Fabian's words at the bridge of Salto de Agua, Don Estevan lost his air of contempt. A sudden presentiment seemed to warn him that his fortunes were waning, and he cast around him an anxious glance. The high rocks, which on one side shut in the valley, might protect him from the fire of his enemies; a short space only separated him from their foot, and prudence counselled him to fly there, but his pride forbade him.

"Well, then!" cried he proudly, after a pause, "revenge yourself on an enemy who disdains to fly."

"Have we not said that we wish to take you alive?" replied Pepé, coldly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING-MAKER A CAPTIVE.

In the whole course of his adventurous life, Don Estevan had never been in such danger. The plain offered him no protection against the rifles of his enemies—two at least of whom had an infallible eye and steady aim —and who had also the advantage of an impregnable position, and turrets of rock behind which to intrench themselves. Don Estevan did not conceal from himself the extent of his danger; but neither did his courage give way.

"Let us have done with this trifling," cried the sonorous voice of Bois-Rose, whose generosity made him averse to profit by his advantages, and who scrupled always to shed blood if he could avoid it. "You have heard that we wish no harm to any but your chief, and you must make up your mind to let us take him. Retire, then, willingly, if you do not wish us to treat you as we intend to treat him."

"Never," cried Diaz, "shall I commit such a cowardice. You are the first comers; so be it—we will yield the ground to you, but Don Estevan must be allowed to go with me."

"We refuse," cried Pepé; "we particularly want the man you call Don Estevan."

"Do not oppose the justice of God," added Fabian; "your cause is only that of man. We give you five minutes to reflect, after

which our rifles and our good cause shall decide between us."

"You have but two minutes to decide," said Bois-Rose; "listen to me, and avoid needless bloodshed."

Mediana kept silence, and preserved his haughty air. Unshakeable in his notions of chivalric honour, Pedro Diaz resolved to die with the chief whose life he believed to be so precious to his country. He consulted Don Estevan by a look.

"Return to the camp," said the latter; "abandon to his fate a man henceforth useless to your cause, and come back to avenge my death."

Diaz was not to be moved, but gradually drew his horse closer to Don Estevan, and when their knees touched, with his face still turned towards his enemies, he murmured, with scarcely a movement of his lips:

"Keep steady in your stirrups, have your horse ready, and let me act."

Don Estevan made signs with his hand as though to demand a truce; but he had taken a desperate determination.

"Bend down, Fabian; he is going to fire," cried Bois-Rose.

"Before my mother's murderer? Never!" cried Fabian. Quick as thought, the hand of the Canadian giant on his shoulder forced him down. Don Estevan vainly sought for an aim for his double-barrelled piece. He could see nothing but the formidable rifle of Bois-Rose directed towards him, although, in obedience to Fabian's wishes, Bois-Rose would not finish the combat by striking his foe to the ground.

With as much courage as agility, Diaz now jumped up behind Don Estevan on his horse, and, throwing his arms around him to steady him after the shock, seized the bridle, turned

the animal round, and galloped off, covering with his body, as with a buckler, the chief whose life he was willing to save at the expense of his own. While Fabian and Pepé rushed down the rock at the risk of breaking their necks, Bois-Rose followed the movements of the horse, glancing along the barrel of his rifle.

The two men appeared to make but one body; the back of the horse, and the shoulders of Diaz, were the only objects at which Bois-Rose could aim; only now and then the head of the animal was visible. To sacrifice Diaz would be a useless murder; and Don Estevan would still escape. A moment more, and the fugitives would be out of range; but the Canadian was of that class of marksmen who lodge a ball in the eye of the beaver, that he may not injure its skin; and it was the horse he wished to aim at. For a single moment the head of the noble animal showed it-

self entirely—but that moment was sufficient; a shot was heard, and the two men and the death-stricken horse rolled over together on the ground.

Bruised by the violence of their fall, both men rose with difficulty; while, their poniards in their teeth, and their rifles in their hands, Fabian and Pepé advanced upon them. Bois-Rose followed with gigantic strides, loading his rifle as he went. When he had finished, he again stopped.

Pedro Diaz, devoted to the last, rushed towards the gun which had fallen from Don Estevan's hands, picked it up, and returned it to him.

"Let us defend ourselves to the last!" cried he, drawing his long knife.

Don Estevan steadied himself and raised his piece, undecided for a moment whether to aim at Fabian or at Pepé; but Bois-Rose was

watching, and a bullet from his rifle broke the weapon of the chief in his hands, just where the barrel joins the stock, and Don Estevan himself, losing his balance, fell forward on the sand.

"At last, after twenty years!" cried Pepé, rushing towards him, and placing his knee upon his breast.

Don Estevan vainly tried to resist; his arm, benumbed by the violence of the blow which had broken his gun, refused its service. In an instant Pepé had united the woollen scarf which was wound several times round his body, and bound with it the limbs of his enemy. Diaz could offer no resistance, for he had himself to defend against the attacks of Fabian.

Fabian scarcely knew the Indian fighter; he had seen him only for a few hours at the Hacienda del Venado; but the generosity of his conduct had awakened in the heart of the

young man a warm sympathy, and he wished to spare his life.

"Surrender, Diaz!" cried he, parrying a dagger blow aimed at him; but Diaz was resolved not to yield, and for the few minutes during which Pepé was engaged in binding Don Estevan, there was a contest of skill and ability between him and Fabian. Too generous to use his rifle against a man who had but a dagger to defend himself with, Fabian tried only to disarm his adversary; but Diaz, blinded by rage, did not perceive the generous efforts of the young man, who, holding his rifle by the barrel, and using it as a club, tried to strike the arm which menaced him. But Fabian had to deal with an antagonist not less active and vigorous than himself. Bounding from right to left, Diaz avoided his blows, and just as Fabian believed he was about to succeed, he found himself striking in

the air, and the knife menacing him afresh. Bois-Rose, without waiting to reload, ran up to put an end to this struggle—in which Fabian's generosity placed him at a disadvantage—and Pepé, having fast bound his enemy, advanced also.

Thus menaced by three men, Diaz determined not to die without vengeance. He drew his arm back, and made a rapid thrust at Fabian; but the latter had been carefully watching the movement, and his rifle met the murdering weapon on its way. The dagger fell to the ground; and Pepé, seizing Diaz round the body just as Fabian struck him, cried, "Fool! must we kill you then? If not, what shall we do with you?"

"What you have done to that noble gentleman," replied Diaz, pointing to Don Estevan.

"Do not ask to share his fate," said Pepé; "that man's days are numbered."

"Whatever his fate is to be I wish to share it," cried Diaz, vainly trying to free himself. "I accept from you neither quarter nor mercy."

"Do not play with our anger!" said Pepé, whose passions were roused; "I am not in the habit of offering mercy twice."

"I know how to make him accept it," said Fabian, picking up the fallen knife. "Let him go, Pepé; with a man like Diaz, one can always come to terms."

Fabian's tone was so firm, that Pepé opened his arms and loosened the iron grasp in which the Mexican was bound.

"Here, Diaz," said Fabian, "take your weapon, and listen to me."

So saying, Fabian advanced and offered him his knife, without any attempt at guarding himself. Diaz took the weapon, but his adversary had not presumed too far: at the

heroic simplicity of Fabian his anger vanished on the instant.

"I listen," said he, flinging his knife to the ground.

"I knew it would be so," replied Fabian, with a smile. "You interposed unknowingly between crime and the just vengeance which pursued it. Do you know who is the man for whom you wish to expose your life?—and who are those who have spared it? Do you know whether or not we have the right to demand from him, whom you doubtless know only as Don Estevan, a terrible account of the past? Reply honestly to the questions that I shall put to you, and then decide on which side justice lies."

Astonished at these words, Diaz listened in silence, and Fabian went on:—

"If you had been born in a privileged class, heir to a great fortune; if a man had taken

from you your fortune and your name, and reduced you to the rank of those who have to work for their daily bread, would you be the friend of that man?"

"No, I should be his enemy."

"If that man, to destroy the last souvenir of your birth, had murdered your mother, what would he deserve from you?"

"Blow for blow—blood for blood."

"If, after a long and difficult pursuit, fate had at last delivered the spoiler into your hands, what would you do?"

"I should think myself guilty towards God and man if I spared him."

"Well, then, Diaz," cried Fabian, "there is a man who has taken from me my name, my fortune, and murdered my mother; I have pursued this murderer and spoiler—fate has delivered him into my hands, and there he lies!"

A cloud passed over the eyes of Diaz at the sight of the chief whose doom was thus pronounced, for the sentiment of inexorable justice that God has implanted in the heart of man told him that Don Estevan merited his fate, if Fabian spoke truly. He sighed, but offered no reply.

While these events were taking place in the midst of the plain, the actors of the scene might have observed Cuchillo raise with precaution the leaves which covered his head, cast an eager glance on the Golden Valley, and then glide out of the lake. Covered with mud, and his garments streaming with water, they might have mistaken him for one of the evil spirits whom the Indians believed to dwell in these solitudes. But their attention was completely absorbed by what was taking place among themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO MEDIANAS FACE TO FACE.

PEDRO DIAZ speedily roused himself from the deep depression and astonishment which had for a moment overpowered him.

"According to the rules of war, I am your prisoner," said he, raising his head, "and I am anxious to know your decision concerning me."

"You are free, Diaz," replied Fabian; "free without conditions."

"Not so! not so!" said the Canadian, quickly interrupting him. "We must, on the

contrary, impose a rigorous condition upon your liberty."

"What is it?" asked the adventurer.

"You have now, in common with us," replied Bois-Rose, "become possessed of a secret which we have long since known. I have my reasons for wishing that the knowledge of this secret should expire with those whose evil destiny makes them acquainted with it. You only" added the Canadian, "will be an exception to the rule, because a brave man like yourself should be a slave to his word. I demand, then, before restoring you your liberty, a promise, upon your honour, never to reveal to human being the existence of the Golden Valley."

"I never indulged any hope in acquiring this treasure," replied the noble adventurer, in a melancholy tone, "beyond that of the freedom and aggrandizement of my country.

The sad fate which threatens the man to whom I looked for the realization of my hopes, proves to me that in both cases I have entertained a delusive dream. Even should all the riches of the Golden Valley remain for ever buried in these deserts, what would it avail me now? I swear, then, and you may rely upon my honour, that I shall never reveal its existence to a living soul. I shall try to forget that I have ever, for an instant, beheld it."

"It is well," said Bois-Rose, "you are now free to go."

"Not yet, with your permission," replied the prisoner. "In all that has taken place there is a mystery which I do not seek to penetrate —but——"

"Carramba! it is very simple," answered Pepé. "This young man," said he, pointing to Fabian—

"Not yet," Fabian replied, the latter solemnly

making a sign to the hunter to postpone his explanations. "In the court of justice which is about to be convened—in the presence of the Supreme Judge" (Fabian pointed to heaven), "by the accusation as well as the defence, all will become clear to Diaz, if he will remain a short while with us. In the desert, time is precious; and we must prepare ourselves, by meditation and silence, for the terrible deed which we are now compelled to accomplish."

"I am most anxious to obtain permission to stay. I do not know if this man be innocent or guilty; but I do know that he is the chief whom I have freely chosen; and I will remain with him to the last, ready to defend him against you at the cost of my own life, if he is innocent—ready to bow before the sentence which condemns him, if he is guilty."

"Be it so," rejoined Fabian. "You shall hear and judge for yourself."

"This man is of noble birth," continued Diaz, sadly, "and he lies yonder in the dust, bound like the meanest criminal."

"Unloose him, Diaz!" replied Fabian, "but do not endeavour to shield him from the vengeance which a son must claim against his mother's murderer. Require from him a promise that he will not attempt to escape; we shall rely upon you in this matter."

"I pledge my honour that he will not do so," said the adventurer, "nor would I assist him in the attempt." And Diaz, as he said this, proceeded towards Don Estevan.

In the meantime, Fabian, oppressed by sad and anxious thoughts, seated himself at some distance, and appeared to deplore his unfortunate victory.

Pepé turned away his head, and for awhile stood as if attentively observing the mists as they floated above the crests of the mountains.

Bois-Rose reclined in his usual attitude of repose, while his eyes, expressive of deep anxiety, were centred upon the young man, and his noble physiognomy seemed to reflect the clouds which gathered upon the brow of his beloved *protégé*.

Meanwhile Diaz had rejoined the prostrate captive.

Who can guess how many conflicting thoughts crowded upon the mind of the Spanish nobleman as he lay upon the ground? His expression retained as much pride as when in his more prosperous days he had imagined the possibility of conquering, and bestowing, a throne upon the deposed heir of the Spanish monarchy. At the sight of Diaz, who he believed had abandoned his cause, an expression of deep melancholy came over his countenance.

"Do you come as an enemy, or a friend,

Diaz?" said he. "Are you one of those who take a secret pleasure in contemplating the humiliation of the man whom, in the days of his prosperity, you, like others, would have flattered?"

"I am one of those who flatter only the fallen," replied Diaz, "and who are not offended by the bitterness of speech which is dictated by great misfortune."

As he uttered these words, which were confirmed by the dejection of his manner, Diaz hastened to remove the cords with which the captive's arms were bound.

"I have given my word that you will not endeavour to escape the fate, whatever it may be, which awaits you at the hands of these men, into whose power we have fallen by an unlucky chance. I believe you have not even thought of flight."

"And you are right, Diaz," replied Don

Estevan; "but can you guess what fate these fellows have reserved for me?"

"They talk of a murder to be avenged—of an accusation, and a judgment."

"A judgment!" replied Antonio, with a haughty and bitter smile; "they may assassinate, but they shall never judge me."

"In the former case, I shall die with you," said Diaz; "in the latter—but of what use is it to speak of that which cannot be? You are innocent of the crime of which they accuse you?"

"I have a presentiment of the fate which awaits me," replied Don Estevan, without answering the adventurer's interrogation. "A faithful subject will be lost to his king—Don Carlos the First. But you will carry on my work?—you will restore the prosperity of Sonora? You will return to the Senator Tragaduros—he knows what he has to do, and you will support him?"

"Ah!" cried Diaz, sadly, "such a work cannot be attempted but by you. In your hands I might have proved a powerful instrument; without you I shall sink into insignificant obscurity. The hope of my country expires with you."

During this interval, Fabian and Bois-Rose had quitted the spot where the preceding scenes had so rapidly taken place. They had reached the base of the pyramid. It was there that the solemn assizes were to be held, in which Fabian and the Duke de Armada were about to act the parts of judge and criminal.

Pepé made a sign to Diaz: Don Estevan saw and understood it.

"It is not enough to have remained a prisoner," said Diaz, "you must meet your fate; the conquered must obey the conqueror—come!"

As Diaz ceased speaking, the Spanish nobleman, armed with the pride which never deserted him, approached the pyramid with a firm step. Pepé had rejoined his two companions.

Don Estevan's looks, as he advanced, displayed a dauntless composure—equally removed from bravado or weakness—which won a glance of admiration from his three enemies—all of them excellent judges of courage.

Fabian rose and stepped forward to meet his noble prisoner. A few paces behind, Diaz also advanced—his head bowed low, and his mind oppressed by gloomy thoughts. Everything in the manner of the conquerors convinced him that, on this occasion, right would be on the side of power.

"My Lord of Mediana," said Fabian, as, with head uncovered, he paused a few steps

in advance of the noble Spaniard who had approached him, " you perceive that I recognize you, and you also know who I am."

The Duke de Armada remained upright and motionless, without responding to his nephew's courtesy.

"I am entitled to keep my head covered in the presence of the King of Spain; I shall use that privilege with you," he replied; "also, I claim the right of remaining silent when I think proper, and shall now exercise that right, if it please you."

Notwithstanding this haughty reply, the younger son of the Medianas could not but remember how he, a trembling and weeping child, had, twenty years before, in the castle of Elanchovi, quailed beneath the glance of the man whom he now presumed to judge.

The timid eaglet had now become the eagle,

which, in its turn, held the prey in its powerful talons.

The glances of the two Medianas crossed like two swords, and Diaz contemplated, with mingled astonishment and respect, the adopted son of the gambusino Arellanos suddenly transformed and raised above the humble sphere in which he had for an instant known him.

The adventurer awaited the solution of this enigma. Fabian armed himself with a pride which equalled that of the Duke de Armada.

"As you will," said he; "yet it might be prudent to remember that here the right claimed by power is not an empty boast."

"It is true," replied Don Antonio, who, notwithstanding his apparent resignation, trembled with rage and despair at the total failure of his hopes. "I ought not to forget that

you are, doubtless, inclined to profit by this right. I shall answer your question, then, when I tell you that I am aware of but one fact concerning you, which is, that some demon has inspired you continually to cast some impediment in the way of the object I pursue—I know——"

Here rage stifled his utterance.

The impetuous young man listened with a changing countenance to the words uttered by the assassin of his mother, and whom he even now suspected to be the murderer of his adopted father.

Truly, it is the heroism of moderation, at which those who do not know the slight value attached to human life in these deserts cannot be sufficiently astonished—for here law cannot touch the offender; but the short space of time which had elapsed since Fabian joined Bois-Rose was sufficient, under the gentle in-

fluence of the old hunter, to calm his feelings immeasurably.

He was no longer the young man whose fiery passions were the instruments of a vengeance to which he yielded blindly. He had learned that power should go hand in hand with justice, and may often be combined with mercy.

This was the secret of a moderation hitherto so opposed to his temperament. It was not, however, difficult to trace, in the changing expression of his countenance, the efforts he had been compelled to make to impose a restraint upon his anger.

On his side, the Spanish noble concealed his passion under the mask of silence.

"So then," resumed Fabian, "you know nothing more of me? You are not acquainted either with my name or rank? I am nothing more to you than what I seem?"

"An assassin, perhaps?" replied Mediana, turning his back to Fabian, to show that he did not wish to reply to his question.

During the dialogue which had taken place between these two men of the same blood, and of equally unconquerable nature, the wood-rangers had remained at some distance.

"Approach," said Fabian, to the ex-carabinier, "and say," added he, with forced calmness, "what you know of me to this man, whose lips have dared to apply to me a name which he only deserves."

If any doubt could still have remained upon Don Estevan's mind with regard to the intentions of those into whose hands he had fallen, that doubt must have disappeared when he beheld the gloomy air with which Pepé came forward in obedience to Fabian's command.

The visible exertion he made to repress the rancorous feelings which the sight of the

Spanish noble aroused in him filled the latter with a sad presentiment.

A shudder passed through the frame of Don Estevan, but he did not lower his eyes, and, by the aid of his invincible pride, he waited with apparent calmness until Pepé began to speak.

"Carramba!" exclaimed the latter, in a tone which he tried in vain to render agreeable. "It was certainly worth while to send me to catch sea-fish upon the borders of the Mediterranean, so that, at the end of my journey, I might, three thousand leagues from Spain, fall in with the nephew whose mother you murdered. I don't know whether Don Fabian de Mediana is inclined to pardon you, but for my part," added he, striking the ground with the butt end of his rifle, "I have sworn that I will not do so."

Fabian directed a haughty glance towards

Pepé, as though to command his submission; then addressing himself to the Spaniard—

"My Lord of Mediana, you are not now in the presence of assassins, but of judges, and Pepé will not forget it."

"Before judges!" cried Don Antonio; "my peers only possess the right of judgment, and I do not recognize as such a malefactor escaped from jail, and a beggarly usurper who has assumed a title to which he has no right. I do not acknowledge here any other Mediana than myself, and have, therefore, no reply to make."

"Nevertheless, I must constitute myself your judge," said Fabian; "yet, believe me, I shall be an impartial one, since I take as a witness that God whose sun shines upon us, when I swear that I no longer entertain any feelings of animosity or hatred against you."

There was so much truth in the manner with

which Fabian pronounced these words, that, for an instant, Don Estevan's countenance lost its expression of gloomy defiance, and was even lit up by a ray of hope; for the Duke de Armada recollected that he stood face to face with the heir for whom, in his pride, he had once mourned. It was, therefore, in a less severe tone that he asked—

"Of what crime am I then accused?"

"You are about to hear," replied Fabian.

CHAPTER VIII.

LYNCH LAW.

On the frontiers of America there exists a terrible law, yet it is not this clause alone which renders it so—"Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, blood for blood." The application of this law is evident in all the ways of Providence, to those who observe the course of events here below. "He who kills by the sword shall perish by the sword," says the Gospel.

But the law of the desert is terrible by

reason of the majesty with which it is invested, or claims to be invested.

This law is terrible in common with all laws of blood, and the more so, since those who have recourse to it usurp a power which does not belong to them, inasmuch as the injured party constitutes himself judge of his own cause, and executes the sentence which he himself has pronounced.

Such is the so-called "Lynch law."

In the central parts of America white men, as well as Indians, execute this law with cruel severity against each other. Civilized communities adopt it in a mitigated form as applied to capital punishment, but the untutored inhabitants of the desert continue to practise it with the same rigour which belonged to the first ages of mankind.

And may we not here make the remark, that the similitude of feeling on this point,

between the white man and the savage, casts a stain upon the former, which for his own honour he should endeavour to wipe out?

Society has provided laws for the protection of all men. The man who amongst us should assume the right of judgment, and take the law into his own hands, would thus violate it, and fall under the jurisdiction of those whom society has appointed to try and to condemn.

We are not without a hope that at some future time, as civilization advances, men will allow that they who deprive a culprit of that life which none can recall, commit an act of sacrilege in defiance of those divine laws which govern the universe, and take precedence of all human decrees.

A time will come, we would fain believe, when our laws may spare the life of a guilty

man, and suffer him to atone for his errors or his crimes by repentance. Such a law would respect the life which can never be restored; and while another exists which casts an irretrievable stain upon our honour, there would be a law of restoration capable of raising the man sanctified by repentance to the dignity which punishment would have prevented his attaining.

"There is more joy in heaven," says the Gospel, "over a sinner who repents than a righteous man made perfect." Why, then, are not human laws a counterpart of these divine decrees?

Now, however, liberty is the only boon which society confers upon him whose misfortunes or whose crimes have deprived him of it.

Misfortunes did we not say? Is there not in truth a law which assimilates the criminal

with the upright though insolvent debtor, and compels him to the same fate in prison?

So much for this subject. Let us now return to the Lynch-law of the desert. It was before a tribunal without appeal, and in the presence of self-constituted judges, that Don Antonio de Mediana was about to appear. A court assembled in a city, with all its imposing adjuncts, could not have surpassed in solemnity the assizes which at this moment were convoked in the desert, where three men represented human justice armed with all its terrors.

We have described the singular and fantastic aspect presented by the spot in which this scene was to be enacted. In truth, the sombre mountains veiled in mist, the mysterious subterranean sounds, the long tufts of human hair agitated by every breath of wind, the skeleton of the Indian horse exposed to view—

all combined to endue the place with a strange unearthly appearance in the eyes of the prisoner, so that he almost believed himself under the influence of some horrible dream.

One might have imagined himself suddenly transported into the middle ages, in the midst of some secret society, where, previous to the admission of the candidate, were displayed all the terrors of the earth, as a means of proving his courage.

All this, however, was here a fearful reality.

Fabian pointed out to the Duke de Armada one of the flat stones, resembling tomb-stones, which were strewed over the plain, and seating himself upon another, so as to form with the Canadian and his companion a triangle, in which he occupied the most elevated position.

"It is not becoming for the criminal to sit in the presence of his judges," said the Spanish

noble, with a bitter smile, " I shall therefore remain standing."

Fabian made no reply.

He waited until Diaz, the only disinterested witness in this court of justice, had chosen a convenient place.

The adventurer remained at some distance from the actors in the scene, yet sufficiently near to see and hear all that passed.

Fabian began :—

" You are about to be told," said he, " of what crime you are accused. You are to look upon me as the judge who presides at your trial, and who will either condemn or acquit you."

Having thus spoken, he paused to consider.

" It will first be necessary to establish the identity of the criminal. Are you in truth," he continued, " that Don Antonio whom men here call the Count de Mediana ? "

"No," replied the Spaniard, in a firm voice.

"Who are you, then?" continued Fabian, "in a mingled tone of astonishment and regret, for he repudiated the idea that a Mediana would have recourse to a cowardly subterfuge.

"I *was* the Count de Mediana," replied the prisoner, with a haughty smile, "until by my sword I acquired other titles. At present I am known in Spain as the Duke de Armada. It is the name I shall transmit to the descendant of my line whom I may choose as my adopted son."

The latter phrase, incidentally spoken by the prisoner, proved in the sequel his sole means of defence.

"Right," said Fabian; "the Duke de Armada shall hear of what crime Don Antonio de Mediana is accused. Speak, Bois-Rose! tell us what you know, and nothing more."

The rough and energetic countenance of the gigantic descendant of the Norman race, as he stood motionless beside them, his carbine supported on his broad shoulder, was expressive of such calm integrity, that his appearance alone banished all idea of perjury. Bois-Rose drew himself up, slowly removed his fur cap, and, in doing so, discovered his fine open brow to the gaze of all.

"I will only speak of what I know," said he. "On a foggy night, in the month of November, 1808, I was a sailor on board a French smuggling-vessel called the 'Albatross'. We had landed, according to a plan formed with the captain of the carabiniers of Elanchovi, on the coast of the Bay of Biscay. I will not relate to you," and here Pepé could not repress a smile, "how we were fired upon, and repulsed from the shore where we had landed as friends. It is sufficient for you to know

that when we again reached our vessel, I was attracted by the screams of a child, which seemed to come from the depths of the ocean. These cries proceeded from a boat which had been abandoned.

"I pushed out towards it at the risk of my own life, since a brisk fire was opened upon our ship.

"In this boat I found a lady murdered, and lying in her blood. She was quite dead, and close to her was a little child, who appeared to be dying.

"I picked up the child—that child is now the man before us; his name is Fabian.

"I took the child with me, and left the murdered lady in the boat. I do not know who committed the crime, and have nothing further to say."

As he finished speaking, Bois-Rose again covered his head, and seated himself in silence.

A mournful silence followed this declaration.

Fabian lowered his flashing eyes for an instant to the ground, then raised them, calm and cold, to the face of the ex-carabinier, whose turn had now come to speak.

Fabian was prepared to act his terrible part, and the countenance as well as the attitude of the young man, though clothed in rags, expressed the nobility which characterized an ancient race, as well as the collected coolness of a judge. He cast an authoritative glance towards Pepé, and the half-savage trapper was compelled to submit to it in silence.

Pepé at length rose, and advanced a few paces, by his manner showing a determination only to utter that which his conscience approved.

"I understand you, Count Mediana," said he, addressing himself to Fabian, who alone in his eyes had the right to assume this title.

"I will try to forget that the man here present is the same who caused me to spend so many long years amongst the refuse of mankind at Ceuta. When I appear before God, he may require of me the words I have spoken, but I should again repeat them, nor regret that they had ever been uttered."

Fabian made a gesture of approbation.

"One night, in the month of November, 1808," said he, "when I belonged to the Royal Carabiniers in the service of Spain, I was on duty upon the coast of Elanchovi, when three men disembarked from the open sea upon the beach.

"Our captain had sold to one of them the right of landing on a forbidden spot.

"I reproach myself with having been this man's accomplice, and receiving from him the price of culpable neglect of my duty.

"The following day it was discovered that the Countess Mediana and her young son had left the castle during the night.

"The countess was murdered—the young count was never seen again.

"A short time after, his uncle appeared at Elanchovi, and claimed his nephew's fortune and titles. All was given up to him, and I, who believed that I had only sold my services to favour an intrigue or an affair of smuggling, found that I had been the accomplice of a murderer.

"I upbraided the present Count Mediana before witnesses, and accused him of this crime. Five years' imprisonment at Ceuta was the reward of my presumption.

"Here, before another and more righteous tribunal, and in the presence of God, who is my witness, I again accuse the man before me. I declare him to be the murderer of

the countess, and the usurper of her son's titles. He was one of the three men who, during the night, entered by escalade the château which Don Fabian's mother never again beheld.

"Let the murderer refute the charge. I have done."

"You hear him," said Fabian; "what have you to say in your defence?"

A violent struggle between his conscience and his pride took place in Mediana's breast.

Pride however triumphed.

"Nothing," replied Don Antonio.

"Nothing!" answered Fabian; "but you do not perhaps know what a terrible duty I have to fulfil?"

"I can imagine it."

"And I," cried Fabian, passionately, "shall not flinch in accomplishing it. Yet, though my mother's blood cries out for vengeance,

should you refute the charge, I would bless you still. Swear to me, then, in the name of Mediana, which we bear in common, by your honour, and the salvation of your soul, that you are innocent, and I shall be only too happy to believe you."

Then, oppressed with intolerable anguish, Fabian awaited his reply.

But, gloomy and inflexible as the fallen archangel, Mediana was silent.

At this moment Diaz advanced towards the judges and the prisoner.

"I have listened," said he, "with the utmost attention to your accusation against Don Estevan de Arechiza, whom I also know to be the Duke de Armada; may I express my thoughts freely?"

"Speak!" said Fabian.

"One point seems to me doubtful. I do not know whether the crime you attribute to

this noble cavalier was committed by him; but admitting that to be the case, have you any right to condemn him? In accordance with the laws of our frontier, where no court may be held, it is only the nearest relatives of the victim who are entitled to claim the blood of the murderer. Don Tiburcio's youth was passed in this country. I knew him as the adopted son of Marcos Arellanos. Who can prove that Tiburcio Arellanos is the son of the murdered lady? How, after so many years, can it be possible for this hunter, formerly a sailor, to recognize, in the midst of these solitudes, the young man whom as a child he beheld only for an instant on a foggy night?"

"Answer, Bois-Rose," said Fabian, coldly.

The Canadian again rose.

"I ought, in the first place, to state," said the old hunter, "that it was not only for a few

moments on a foggy night that I saw the child in question. During the space of two years, after having saved him from certain death, I kept him on board the vessel in which I was a sailor. The features of his son could not be more deeply impressed upon the memory of a father than those of that child were on mine. How, then, can you affirm that it is impossible that I should recognize him? When you are travelling in the desert, where there is no beaten track, are you not guided by the course of streams, by the character of the trees, by the conformation of their trunks, by the growth of the moss which clothes them, and by the stars of heaven? — and when at another season, or even twenty years afterwards, should the rains have swelled the streams, or the sun have dried them up, should

the once naked trees be clothed with leaves, should their trunks have expanded, and moss covered their roots, even should the north star have changed its position in the heavens, and you again beheld it, would you not recognize both star and stream?"

"Doubtless," replied Diaz, "the man who has experience in the desert is seldom deceived."

"When you meet a stranger in the forest, who answers you with the cry of a bird or the voice of an animal, which is to serve as a rallying signal to you or your friends, do you not immediately say, 'This man is one of us?'"

"Assuredly."

"Well, then, I recognize the child in the grown man, just as you recognize the small shrub in the tall tree, or the stream that once murmured softly in the roaring and swollen torrent

of to-day. I know this child again by a mode of speech which twenty years have scarcely altered."

"Is not this meeting a somewhat strange coincidence?" interrupted Diaz, now almost convinced of the Canadian's veracity.

"God," cried Bois-Rose, solemnly, "who commands the breeze to waft across the desert the fertilizing seeds of the male palm to the female date-tree—God, who confides to the wind which destroys, to the devastating torrent, or to the bird of passage, the grain which is to be deposited a thousand miles from the plant that produced it—is he not also able to send upon the same path two human beings made in his image?"

Diaz was silent a moment; then having nothing more to advance in contradiction to the Canadian's truthful words, whose honest manner of speech carried with it an ir-

resistible conviction, he turned towards Pepé:—

"Did you," said he, "also recognize in Arellanos' adopted child the Countess de Mediana's son?"

"It would be impossible for any one who ever saw his mother long to mistake him. Enough! let the Duke d'Armada contradict us."

Don Antonio, too proud to utter a falsehood, could not deny the truth without degrading himself in the eyes of his accusers, unless he destroyed the only means of defence to which his pride and the secret wish of his heart allowed him to have recourse.

"It is true," said he, "that this man is of my own blood. I cannot deny it without polluting my lips with a lie, and an untruth is the offspring of cowardice."

Diaz inclined his head, regained his seat, and was silent.

"You have heard," said Fabian, "that I am indeed the son of the woman whom this man murdered; therefore I claim the right of avenging her. What, then, do the laws of the desert decree?"

"Eye for eye," said Bois-Rose.

"Tooth for tooth," added Pepé.

"Blood for blood," continued Fabian; "a death for a death!"

Then he rose, and addressing Don Antonio in measured accents, said:—

"You have shed blood, and committed murder. It shall therefore be done to you as you have done to others. God commanded it to be so."

Fabian drew his poniard from its sheath. The sun was shedding his first rays upon the

scene, and every object cast a long shadow upon the ground.

A bright flash shot from the naked blade which the younger Mediana held in his hand.

Fabian buried its point in the sand.

The shadow of the poniard far exceeded its length.

"The sun," he said, "shall determine how many moments you have to live. When the shadow disappears, you shall appear before God, and my mother will be avenged."

A deathlike silence succeeded Fabian's last words, who, overcome with long suppressed emotions, fell, rather than seated himself, upon the stone.

Bois-Rose and Pepé both retained their seats. The judges and the criminal were alike motionless.

Diaz perceived that all was over, but he

did not wish to take any part in the execution of the sentence.

He approached the Duke de Armada, knelt down before him, took his hand and raised it to his lips.

"I will pray for the salvation of your soul," said he, in a low tone. "Do you release me from my oath?"

"Yes," replied Don Antonio, in a firm voice; "go, and may God bless you for your fidelity!"

The noble adventurer retired in silence.

His horse had remained at some short distance.

Diaz soon reached it, and holding the bridle in his hands, walked slowly towards the spot where the river forked.

In the meantime, the sun followed its eternal course—the shadows gradually contracted—the black vultures flew in circles above the

heads of the four actors in the terrible drama, the last scene of which was now drawing near. From the depths of the Misty Mountains, shrouded in vapour, might be heard, at intervals, dull rumbling sounds, like thunder, followed by distant explosions.

Pale, but resigned, the unfortunate Count de Mediana remained standing. Buried in deep reverie, he did not appear to notice the continually decreasing shadow.

All exterior objects vanished from his sight. His thoughts were divided between the past, which no longer concerned him, and the future he was about to enter.

However, pride still struggled within him, and he maintained an obstinate silence.

"My Lord Count," said Fabian, who was willing to try a last chance, "in five minutes the poniard will have ceased to cast a shadow."

"I have nothing to say of the past," replied Don Antonio. "I must now think only of the future of my race. Do not, therefore, misjudge the sense of the words I am about to speak. Whatever may be the form in which it may come, death has no power to terrify me."

"I am listening," said Fabian, gently.

"You are very young, Fabian," continued Mediana, "and the thought of the blood which has been shed will, therefore, be so much the longer a burthen to you."

Fabian's countenance revealed the anguish of his feelings.

"Why then so soon pollute a life which is scarcely begun? Why refuse to follow a course which the unlooked-for favour of Providence opens to you? Here you are poor, and without connections. God restores you to your family, and, at the same moment, con-

fers wealth upon you. The inheritance of your race has not been squandered by me. I have for twenty years borne the name of Mediana at the head of the Spanish nobles, and I am ready to restore it to you with all the honours I have conferred upon it. Accept then a fortune which I joyfully restore to you, for the isolation of my life is burthensome to me; but do not purchase it by a crime, for which an imaginary act of justice cannot absolve you, and which you will repent to your last hour."

Fabian replied:—

"A judge who presides at his tribunal must not listen to the voice of nature. Supported by his conscience, and the service he renders to society, he may pity the criminal, though his duty requires that he shall condemn him. In this solitude, these two men and myself represent human justice. Refute the crime

attributed to you, Don Antonio, and I shall be the happiest of us two; for though I shudder to accuse you, I cannot escape the fatal mission which Heaven has imposed upon me."

"Consider well, Fabian, and remember that it is not pardon, but oblivion, for which I sue. Thanks to that oblivion, it rests with you to become, as my adopted son, the princely heir of the house of Mediana. After my death my title will expire."

As he listened to these words, the young man became deadly pale; but spurning in his heart the temptation held out to him, Fabian closed his ears to that voice which offered him so large a share of the riches of this world, as though he had but heard the light whispers of the breeze amid the foliage of the trees.

"Oh, Count Mediana, why did you kill my mother?" cried Fabian, covering his face

with his hands; then, glancing towards the poniard planted in the sand, "My Lord of Armada," he added, solemnly, "the poniard is without a shadow!"

Don Antonio trembled in spite of himself, as he then recalled the prophetic threat which, twenty years before, the Countess de Mediana had compelled him to hear.

"Perhaps," she had said, "the God whom you blaspheme will ordain that in the heart of a desert, untrodden by the foot of man, you shall find an accuser, a witness, a judge, and an executioner."

Accuser, witness, and judge were all before him—but who was to be the executioner? However, nothing was wanting for the accomplishment of the dreadful prophecy.

A noise of branches suddenly torn apart was heard at this moment.

The moment after a man emerged from

the brushwood, his habiliments dripping with water and soiled with mud. It was Cuchillo.

The bandit advanced with an air of imperturbable coolness, though he appeared to limp slightly.

Not one of the four men, so deeply absorbed in their own terrible reflections, showed any astonishment at his presence.

"Carramba! you expected me, then?" he cried; "and yet I persisted in prolonging the most disagreeable bath I have ever taken, for fear of causing you all a surprise, for which my self-love might have suffered" (Cuchillo did not allude to his excursion in the mountains); "but the water of this lake is so icy, that rather than perish with cold, I would have run a greater risk than meeting with old friends. Added to this, I felt a wound in my leg re-open. It was received some time since,

in fact, long ago, in my youth. Señor Don Estevan, Don Tiburcio, I am your very humble servant."

A profound silence succeeded these words. Cuchillo began to feel he was acting the part of the hare who takes refuge in the teeth of the hounds; but he endeavoured, by a great show of assurance, to make the best of a position which was more than precarious.

The old hunter alone glanced towards Fabian, as though to ask what motive this man, with his impudent and sinister manner, and his beard covered with greenish mud, could offer for thus intruding himself upon them.

"It is Cuchillo," said Fabian, answering Bois-Rose's look.

"Cuchillo, your unworthy servant," continued the bandit, "who has been a witness to your prowess, most worthy hunter of tigers. Decidedly," thought Cuchillo, "my presence

is not so obnoxious to them as I should have supposed."

Then feeling his assurance redoubled at the reception he had met with, which, though cold and silent as that with which every new comer is received in the house of death, still gave him courage to say, observing the severe expression on every face—"Pardon me, gentlemen! I observe you have business in hand, and I am, perhaps, intruding; I will retire. There are moments when one does not like to be disturbed; I know it by experience."

Saying these words, Cuchillo showed his intention of crossing a second time the green enclosure of the Valley of Gold, when Bois-Rose's rough voice arrested him.

"Stay here, as you value the salvation of your soul, Master Cuchillo!" said the hunter.

"The giant may have heard of my intel-

lectual resources," thought Cuchillo. "They have need of me. After all, I would rather go shares with them than get nothing; but without doubt this Golden Valley is bewitched. You allow, master hunter," he continued, addressing the Canadian, and feigning a surprise he did not feel at the aspect of his chief, "I have a ——"

An imperious gesture from Fabian cut short Cuchillo's demand.

"Silence!" he said, "do not distract the last thoughts of a Christian who is about to die."

We have said that the poniard planted in the ground no longer cast a shadow.

"My Lord of Mediana," added Fabian, "I ask you once again, by the name we bear, by your honour, and the salvation of your soul, are you innocent of my mother's murder?"

To this lofty interrogation Don Antonio

replied, without relaxing his haughty demeanour:—

"I have nothing to say; to my peers alone I allow the right of judgment. Let my fate and yours be accomplished."

"God sees and hears me," said Fabian. Then taking Cuchillo aside: "A solemn sentence has been passed upon this man," said he to him. "We, as the instruments of human justice in this desert, command you to be his executioner. The treasures contained in this valley will remunerate you for undertaking this terrible duty. May you never commit a more iniquitous act!"

"One cannot live through forty years without having a few little peccadilloes on one's conscience, Don Tiburcio. However, I shall not the less object to being an executioner; and I am proud to know that my talents are estimated at their real value. You promise,

then, that all the gold of this valley shall be mine?"

"All—without excepting the smallest particle."

"Carramba! notwithstanding my well-known scruples, it is a good price, therefore I shall not hesitate; and if at the same time there is any other little favour you require of me, do not distress yourself—it shall be done cheaply."

That which has been previously said explains Cuchillo's unexpected appearance.

The outlaw, concealed upon the borders of the neighbouring lake, had escaped during the prologue which preceded the fearful drama in which he was about to perform a part. Taking all things into consideration, he saw that matters were turning out better than he had expected.

However, he could not disguise from him-

self the fact that there was a certain amount of danger in his becoming the executioner of the man who was aware of all his crimes, and who could, by a single word, surrender him to the implacable justice enforced in these solitudes.

He was aware that to gain the promised recompense, and to prevent Don Antonio from speaking, it would be necessary first to deceive him, and he found means to whisper in the ear of the prisoner—

"Fear nothing—I am on your side."

The spectators of this terrible scene maintained a profound silence, under a feeling of awe experienced by each of them.

A deep dejection of spirit had, in Don Fabian's case, succeeded the energetic exercise of his will, and his face, bowed towards the earth, was as pale and as livid as that of

the man upon whom he had pronounced sentence of death.

Bois-Rose—whom the frequent dangers which belong to the life of a sailor or hunter had rendered callous to the physical horror with which one man looks upon the destruction of his fellow—appeared completely absorbed in the contemplation of this young man, whom he loved as a son, and whose dejected attitude showed the depth of his grief.

Pepé, on his side, endeavoured to conceal, under an impenetrable mask, the tumultuous feelings resulting from his now satisfied vengeance. He, as well as his two companions, remained silent.

Cuchillo alone—whose sanguinary and vindictive nature would have led him to accept gratuitously the odious office of an executioner—could scarcely conceal his delight at

the thoughts of the enormous sum he was to receive for his wicked services.

But in this case, for once in his life, Cuchillo was to assist in an apparently legal proceeding.

"Carramba!" he ejaculated, taking Pepé's carbine from him, and at the same time making a sign to Don Antonio, "this is an affair for which even the judge of Arispe himself would be sorry to grant me absolution."

He advanced towards Don Antonio.

Pale, but with flashing eyes, uncertain whether in Cuchillo he beheld a saviour or an executioner, Don Estevan did not stir.

"It was foretold that I should die in a desert; I am, what you are pleased to call, convicted and condemned. God has reserved for me the infinite disgrace of dying by the hand of this man. I forgive you, Fabian;

but may not this bandit prove as fatal to your life as he will be to that of your father's brother, as he was—"

A cry from Cuchillo—a cry of alarm—here interrupted the Duke de Armada.

"To arms! To arms! yonder come the Indians!" cried he.

Fabian, Bois-Rose, and Pepé rushed to seize their rifles. Cuchillo took advantage of this short instant, and sprang towards Don Antonio. The latter, with his neck stretched forward, was also examining the wide extent of the plain, when Cuchillo twice plunged the poniard into his throat.

The unfortunate Mediana fell to the ground, vomiting forth torrents of blood.

A smile relaxed Cuchillo's lips; Don Antonio had carried out of the world the secret which he dreaded.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

An instant of stupor succeeded to the murder so suddenly accomplished. Don Antonio did not stir; Fabian seemed to forget that the bandit had only hastened the execution of the sentence which he himself had pronounced.

"Wretch!" cried he, rushing towards Cuchillo, with the barrel of his carbine in his hand, as though he did not deign to raise its butt against the executioner.

"There, there!" said Cuchillo, drawing back, whilst Pepé, more ready to acquit Don Antonio's murderer, interposed between them; "you are as quick and passionate as a fighting-cock, and ready every instant to sport your horns like a young bull. The Indians are too busy elsewhere to trouble themselves about us. It was a stratagem of war, to enable me more speedily to render you the signal service required of me. Do not therefore be ungrateful; for why not admit it? You were just now a nephew, most unsufferably encumbered with an uncle; you are noble, you are generous; you would have regretted all your life that you had not pardoned that uncle? By cutting the matter short for you, I have taken the remorse upon myself; and so the affair is ended."

"The rascal knows what he is about, undoubtedly," remarked the ex-carabinier.

"Yes," replied Cuchillo, evidently flattered; "I pride myself upon being no fool, and upon having some notion of the scruples of conscience. I have taken your doubts upon mine. When I take a fancy to people, I sacrifice myself for them. It is a fault of mine. When I saw, Don Tiburcio, that you had so generously pardoned me the blow—the scratch I inflicted upon you—I did my best to deserve it; the rest must be settled between me and my conscience."

"Ah!" sighed Fabian, "I had hoped yet to have been able to pardon *him*."

"Why trouble yourself about it?" said the ex-carabinier. "Pardon your mother's murderer, Don Fabian! it would have been cowardice! To kill a man who cannot defend himself, is, I grant, almost a crime, even after five years' imprisonment. Our friend Cuchillo has spared us the embarrassment of choosing;

that is his affair. What do you say, Bois-Rose?"

"With proofs such as those we possess, the tribunal of a city would have condemned the assassin to atone for his crime; and Indian justice could not have done less. It was God's will that you should be spared the necessity of shedding the blood of a white man. I say as you do, Pepé, it is Cuchillo's affair."

Fabian inclined his head, without speaking, in acquiescence to the old hunter's verdict—as though in his own heart he could not determine, amidst such conflicting thoughts, whether he ought to rejoice or to grieve over this unexpected catastrophe.

Nevertheless, a shade of bitter regret overspread his countenance; but accustomed, as well as his two companions, to scenes of blood, he assented, though with a sigh, to their inexorable logic.

In the meantime, Cuchillo had regained all his audacity; things were turning out well for him.

He cast a glance of satisfied hatred upon the corpse of him who could never more speak, and muttered in a low voice:—

"Why trouble one's self about human destiny?—for twenty years past, my life has depended upon nothing more than the absence of a tree."

Then addressing himself to Fabian:—

"It is, then, agreed that I have rendered you a great service. Ah! Don Tiburcio, you must resolve to remain in my debt. I think generously of furnishing you with the means of discharging it. There is immense wealth yonder; therefore, it would not do for you to recall a promise given to him who, for your sake, was not afraid—for the first time, let

me tell you—to come to an open rupture with his conscience."

Notwithstanding the promise Fabian had made—to satisfy his cupidity by the possession of the gold,—Cuchillo knew that to make a promise, and to keep one, are two different things. He therefore awaited the reply with anxiety.

"It is true; the price of blood is yours," said Fabian to the bandit.

Cuchillo assumed an indignant air.

"Well, you will be magnificently recompensed," continued the young man, contemptuously; "but it shall never be said that I shared it with you;—the gold of this place is yours."

"All?" cried Cuchillo, who could not believe his ears.

"Have I not said so?"

"You are mad!" exclaimed Pepé and Bois-

Rose, simultaneously; "the fellow would have killed him for nothing!"

"You are a god!" cried Cuchillo; "and you estimate my scruples at their real value. What! all this gold?"

"All, including the smallest particle," answered Fabian, solemnly; "I shall have nothing in common with you—not even this gold."

And he made a sign to Cuchillo to leave the ground.

The bandit, instead of passing through the hedge of cotton-trees, took the road to the Misty Mountains, towards the spot where his horse was fastened.

A few minutes afterwards he returned with his sarape in his hand. He drew aside the interlacing branches which shut in the valley, and soon disappeared from Fabian's sight.

The sun, in the midst of his course, poured down a flood of light, causing the gold spread over the surface of the valley to shoot forth innumerable rays.

A shudder passed through Cuchillo's veins as he once more beheld it.

His heart beat quick at the sight of this mass of wealth. He resembled the tiger, who, falling upon a sheepfold, cannot determine which victim to choose. He encompassed with a haggard glance the treasures spread at his feet; and little was wanting to induce him, in his transports of joy, to roll himself in these floods of gold.

Soon, however, restored to calmer thoughts, he spread his mantle on the sand; and, as he saw the impossibility of carrying away all the riches exposed to his view, he cast around him a glance of observation.

In the meantime, Diaz, seated at some dis-

tance on the plain, had not lost a single detail of this melancholy scene.

He had seen Cuchillo suddenly appear, he had imagined the part he would be required to fulfil, he had heard the bandit's cry of false alarm, and even the bloody catastrophe of the drama had not been unseen by him.

Until then he had remained motionless in his place, mourning over the death of his chief, and the hopes which that death had destroyed.

Cuchillo had disappeared from their sight, when the three hunters saw Diaz rise and approach them.

He advanced with slow steps, like the justice of God, whose instrument he also was about to become.

His arm was passed through his horse's bridle; and his face, clouded by grief, was turned downwards.

The adventurer cast a look full of sadness upon the Duke de Armada lying in his blood; death had not effaced from that countenance its look of unalterable pride.

"I do not blame you," said he; "in your place I should have done the same thing. How much Indian blood have *I* also not spilt to satisfy my vengeance!"

"It is holy bread," interrupted Bois-Rose, passing his hand through his thick grey hair, and directing a sympathetic glance towards the adventurer. "Pepé and I can say that, for our part ——"

"I do not blame you, friends, but I grieve because I have seen this man, of such noble courage, fall almost before my eyes; a man who held in his hand the destiny of Sonora. I grieve that the glory of my country expires with him."

"He was, as you say, a man of noble

courage, but with a heart of stone. May God save his soul!"

A convulsive grief agitated Don Fabian's breast. Diaz continued the Duke of Armada's funeral oration.

"He and I had dreamed of the freedom of a noble province and days of splendour. Neither he, nor I, nor others, will ever now behold them shine. Ah! why was not I killed instead of him? No one would have known that I had ceased to exist, and one champion less would not have compromised the cause we served; but the death of our chief ruins it for ever. The treasure which is said to be accumulated here might have aided us in restoring Sonora; for you do not, perhaps, know that near to this spot——"

"We know it," interrupted Fabian.

"Well," continued Diaz, "I will think no more about this immense treasure. I

have always preferred the life of an Indian, killed by my own hands, to a sack of gold dust."

This common feeling of hatred towards the Indians still further added to the sympathy which Bois-Rose had felt for the disinterestedness and courage shown by Diaz.

"We have failed at the onset," continued Diaz, in a tone of great bitterness, "and all this through the fault of a traitor whom I wish to deliver up to your justice—not because he deceived us, but because he has destroyed the instrument which God was willing to grant, in order to make my country a powerful kingdom."

"What do you say?" cried Fabian; "is it Cuchillo of whom you speak?"

"The traitor who twice attempted your life—the first time at the Hacienda del Venado, the second in the neighbouring forest

—is the one who conducted us to this Valley of Gold."

"It was then Cuchillo who told you the secret! I was almost sure of it—but are you also certain?"

"As certain as I am that I shall one day appear before God. Poor Don Estevan related to me how the existence and position of the treasure became known to Cuchillo; it was in assassinating his associate, who had first discovered it. And now, if you decide that this man who has twice attempted your life deserves exemplary chastisement, you have only to determine upon it."

As he finished these words, Pedro Diaz tightened his horse's girths, and prepared to depart.

"One word more!" cried Fabian; "has Cuchillo long possessed this grey horse, which,

as you may be aware, has a habit of stumbling?"

"More than two years, from what I have heard."

This last scene had escaped the bandit's observation, the thicket of cotton trees concealing it from his sight; besides, he was too much absorbed in the contemplation of his treasures to turn his eyes away from them.

Seated upon the sand, he was crouching down amidst the innumerable pieces of gold which surrounded him, and he had already begun to pile them up upon his sarape, all those he had chosen, when Diaz finished his terrible revelation.

"Ah! it is a fearful and fatal day," said Fabian, in whose mind the latter part of this revelation left no room for doubt. "What ought I to do with this man? You, who both know what he has done with my adopted father—

Pepé—Bois-Rose—advise me, for my strength and resolution are coming to an end. I have experienced too many emotions for one day."

"Does the vile wretch who cut your father's throat deserve more consideration than the noble gentleman who murdered your mother, my son?" answered the Canadian, resolutely.

"Whether it be your adopted father or any others who have been his victims, this brigand is worthy of death," added Diaz, as he mounted upon his saddle, "and I abandon him to your justice."

"It is with regret that I see you depart," said Bois-Rose to the adventurer; "a man who like yourself is a bitter enemy to the Indians would have been a companion whose society I should have appreciated."

"My duty calls me to the camp, which I

quitted under the influence of Don Estevan's unhappy star," replied the adventurer; "but there are two things I shall never forget: they are, the conduct of generous enemies, and the oath I have taken never to reveal to a living creature the existence of this Golden Valley."

As he finished these words, the loyal Diaz quickly withdrew, reflecting upon the means of reconciling his respect for his word with the care and safety of the expedition entrusted to him by its leader, previous to his death.

The three friends speedily lost sight of him.

The sun shone out, and, glancing down into the Golden Valley, discovered Cuchillo greedily bending over his treasures, and the three hunters holding counsel amongst themselves respecting him.

Fabian had listened in silence to Bois-Rose's

advice, as well as that given by Diaz previous to his departure; and he only awaited the counsel of the old carabinier.

"You have taken," said the latter, in his turn, "a vow, from which nothing ought to release you; the wife of Arellanos received it from you on her death-bed; you have her husband's murderer in your power; there is nothing here to deny it."

Then, observing a look of anxious indecision in Fabian's countenance, he added, with that bitter irony which formed a part of his character, "But, after all, if this duty is so repugnant to you, I shall undertake it; for not having the least ill-will against Cuchillo, I can hang him without a scruple. You will see, Fabian, that the knave will not testify any surprise at what I am going to tell him. Fellows who have such a face as Cuchillo's expect to be hung every day."

As he concluded this judicious reflection, Pepé approached the green hedge which separated them from the outlaw.

The latter, unconscious of all that had taken place around him—dazzled, blinded, by the golden rays, which reflected the sun's light over the surface of the valley—had heard and seen nothing.

With fingers doubled up, he was busied rummaging amongst the sand with the eagerness of a famished jackal disinterring a corpse.

"Master Cuchillo! a word, if you please," cried Pepé, drawing aside the branches of the cotton shrubs; "Master Cuchillo!"

But Cuchillo did not hear.

It was only when he had been called three times that he turned round, and discovered his excited countenance to the carabinier—after having, by a spontaneous movement of

suspicion, thrown a corner of his mantle over the gold he had collected.

"Master Cuchillo," resumed Pepé, "I heard you a little while ago give utterance to a philosophical maxim which gives me the highest opinion of your character."

"Come!" said Cuchillo to himself, wiping the sweat from his forehead, "here is some one else who requires my services. These gentry are becoming imprudent, but, *por Dios!* they pay handsomely."

Then aloud:—

"A philosophical maxim?" said he, throwing away, disdainfully, a handful of sand, the contents of which would elsewhere have rejoiced a gold-seeker. "What is it? I utter many, and of the best kind; philosophy is my strong point."

Pepé, on one side of the hedge, resting upon his rifle, in a superb attitude of *non-*

chalance, and the most imperturbable *sang-froid,* and Cuchillo, on the other side, with his head stretched across the green enclosure of the little valley, looked very much like two country neighbours, for the moment chatting familiarly together.

No one, on seeing them thus, would have suspected the terrible catastrophe which was to follow this pacific intercourse. The countenance of the ex-carabinier, only exhibited a gracious smile.

"You spoke truth," replied Pepé. "What signifies human destiny? For twenty years past you say you have owed your life to the absence of a tree."

"It is true," affirmed Cuchillo, in an absent tone; "for a long time I preferred shrubs, but lately I have become reconciled to large trees."

"Indeed!"

"And yet, it is still one of my favourite maxims, that a wise man must pass over many little inconveniences."

"True. And now I think of it," added Pepé, carelessly, "there are on the summit of yonder steep hill two magnificent pine-trees, which project over the abyss, and which, twenty years ago, might have caused you very serious anxiety."

"I do not deny it; but, at present, I am as easy about it as if they were only cactus plants."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed!" repeated Cuchillo, with some impatience. "So, then, you did me the honour to speak of me, and to what purpose?"

"Oh! a simple remark. My two companions and myself had some reasons for suspecting that amongst these mountains a certain

Valley of Gold was to be found; but, nevertheless, it was only after long seeking that we found it. You also know it now, and even better than ourselves, since, unhesitatingly, and without losing an instant, you have appropriated to yourself, between what you call a heap and what you have already collected, carramba! enough to build a church to your patron saint."

Cuchillo, at the recollection of the imprudence he had been guilty of, and at this indirect attack, felt his legs give way under him.

"It is certainly my intention not to employ this gold to any other purpose than a godly one," said he, concealing his anguish as well as he could. "As to the knowledge of this wonderful valley, it is to—it is to chance that I owe it."

"Chance always comes to the assistance of

virtue," replied Pepé, coldly. "Well, in your place, I should not, nevertheless, be without anxiety touching the vicinity of those two pine trees."

"What do you mean?" cried Cuchillo, turning pale.

"Nothing—unless this may prove to you one of those trifling inconveniences about which you just now said a man should not trouble himself. *Por Dios!* you have enough booty to render a king jealous."

"But I acquired this gold legitimately,—I committed no murder to obtain it. What I did was not worthless. The devil! I am not in the habit of killing for nothing," cried Cuchillo, exasperated, and who, mistaking the carabinier's intention, saw only in his alarming innuendoes regret at his defrauded cupidity.

Like the sailor, who, overtaken by a storm,

throws a part of his cargo overboard to save the rest, Cuchillo resolved, with a sigh, to shun, by means of a sacrifice, the danger with which he was threatened.

"I again repeat to you," said he in a low voice, "chance alone gave me a knowledge of this treasure; but I don't wish to be selfish. It is my intention to give you a share. Listen," he continued, "there is in a certain place a block of gold of inestimable value: honest fellows should understand one another, and this block shall be yours. Ah! your share will be better than mine."

"I hope so," said Pepé; "and in what place have you reserved me my portion?"

"Up yonder!" said Cuchillo, indicating the summit of the pyramid.

"Up yonder, near the pine trees? Ah, Master Cuchillo, how glad I am to find that you have not taken my foolish little joke

amiss, and that these trees do not affect you any more than if they were cactus plants! Between ourselves, Don Tiburcio, whom you perceive to be deeply absorbed, is only regretting in reality the enormous sum he has given you for a service which he could equally well have performed himself."

"An enormous sum!—it was but a very fair price; and at any rate I should have lost it," cried Cuchillo, recovering all his habitual impudence of manner on seeing the change that had taken place in the conduct and tone of the ex-carabinier.

"Agreed," continued the latter, "but in truth he may have repented of the bargain; and I must avow that if he commanded me to blow your brains out, in order to get rid of you, I should be compelled to obey him. Allow me, then, to call him here, so as to restore his confidence; or, better still, come and

show me the portion which your munificence destines for me. Afterwards, we shall each go our own way; and, notwithstanding all you have said about it, the share assigned to you will surpass all your expectations."

"Let us set off, then," resumed Cuchillo, happy to see a negotiation—the probable result of which began to cause him serious uneasiness—terminate so satisfactorily for him; and casting a glance of passionate tenderness upon a heap of gold which he had piled up upon his wrapper, he set off towards the summit of the pyramid. He had scarcely reached it, when, upon Pepé's invitation, Fabian and Bois-Rose began to ascend the steep on the other side.

"No one can escape his fate," said Pepé to Fabian; "and I have already proved to you that the rascal would testify no astonishment. Be that as it may, remember that you have

sworn to avenge the death of your adopted father, and that in these deserts you ought to shame the justice of cities, where such crimes go unpunished. To show mercy towards such a knave is an outrage to society! Bois-Rose, I shall need the assistance of your strong arm.

The Canadian hunter, by a glance, interrogated him for whom his blind devotion knew no bounds.

"Marcos Arellanos craved pardon and did not obtain it," said Fabian, no longer undecided, "and as this man did to others, so let it be done to him."

And these three inexorable men seated themselves solemnly upon the summit of the pyramid, where Cuchillo already awaited them. At sight of the severe aspect of those whom he had inwardly so many reasons to dread, Cuchillo felt all his apprehensions renewed.

He endeavoured, however, to recover his assurance.

"Do you see," said he, pointing out behind the sheet of water whose majestic torrent foamed beside them, "the spot where the block of gold sheds forth its dazzling rays?"

But the eyes of his judges did not turn in the direction he indicated. Fabian rose slowly —his look caused the blood to curdle in the veins of the outlaw.

"Cuchillo!" said he, "you saved me from dying of thirst, and you have not done this for one who is ungrateful. I have forgiven you the stab with which you wounded me at the Hacienda del Venado. I have pardoned another attempt you made near El Salto de Agua; also the shot which you only could have fired upon us from the summit of this pyramid. I might, in short, have forgiven every attempt you have made to take away

a life you once saved; and having pardoned you, I have even recompensed you, as a king does not recompense the executioner of his justice."

"I do not deny it; but this worthy hunter who has informed me, with a great deal of circumspection, upon the delicate subject you wish to touch upon, ought also to inform you how reasonable he found me in the matter."

"I have forgiven you," continued Fabian; "but there is one crime amongst others from which your own conscience ought not to absolve you."

"There is a perfect understanding between my conscience and myself," resumed Cuchillo, with a graciously sinister smile; "but it seems to me that we are getting away from our subject."

"That friend whom you assassinated in such a cowardly manner——"

"Disputed with me the profits of a booty, and, faith, the consumption of brandy was very considerable," interrupted Cuchillo. "But permit me——"

"Do not pretend to misunderstand me!" cried Fabian, irritated by the knave's impudence.

Cuchillo collected his thoughts.

"If you allude to Tio Tomas, it is an affair which was never very well understood; but——"

Fabian opened his lips to form a distinct accusation with reference to the assassination of Arellanos, when Pepé broke in—

"I should be curious," he said, "to learn the real facts concerning Tio Tomas: perhaps Master Cuchillo has not sufficient leisure to recollect himself, which would be a pity."

"I hold it necessary," continued Cuchillo,

flattered by the compliment, "to prove that men own such a susceptible conscience as mine. Here then are the facts: — My friend Tio Tomas had a nephew impatient to inherit his uncle's fortune. I received a hundred dollars from the nephew to hasten the moment of his inheritance. It was very little for such a capital will. It was so little, that I gave Tio Tomas warning, and received *two* hundred dollars to prevent his nephew becoming his heir. I committed a fault in—despatching the nephew without giving him warning, as I ought to have done, perhaps. It was then I felt how inconvenient a quarrelsome conscience like mine may become. I seized upon the only means of composition which was left me. The nephew's money was a continual remorse to me, and I resolved to get rid of it."

"Of the money?"

"Not so."

"And you despatched the uncle as well?" cried Pepé.

Cuchillo assented.

"From that time my conscience had but little to reproach me with. I had gained three hundred dollars by the most ingenious integrity."

Cuchillo was yet smiling, when Fabian exclaimed—

"Were you paid for assassinating Marcos Arellanos?"

At this astounding accusation a livid paleness overspread Cuchillo's features.

He could no longer disguise from himself the fate which awaited him.

The bandage which covered his eyes fell suddenly; and to the flattering delusions with which he had deceived himself succeeded a formidable reality.

"Marcos Arellanos!" he stammered out,

in a weak voice, "who told you that? I did not kill him!"

Fabian smiled bitterly.

"Who tells the shepherd," he cried, "where the den of the jaguar is to be found that devours his sheep? Who tells the vaquero where the horse that he pursues has taken refuge? To the Indian, the enemy he seeks? To the gold-seeker, the ore concealed by God? The surface of the lake only does not preserve the trace of the bird which flies over its waters, nor the form of the cloud which it reflects; but the earth, with its herbs and mosses, reveals to us, sons of the desert, the print of the jaguar's foot as well as the horse's hoof and the Indian's track; do you not know it, even as I do?"

"I did not kill Arellanos," repeated the assassin.

"You did kill him; you cut his throat near

to our common country; you threw his corpse into the river; the earth revealed it to me—since I noticed the defect in the horse you rode, as well as the wound in your leg, which you received in the struggle."

"Pardon, Don Tiburcio!" cried Cuchillo, overwhelmed by the sudden revelation of these facts, to which God alone had been witness. "Take back all the gold you gave me, but spare my life; and to show my gratitude, I will kill all your enemies everywhere, and always at a sign from you—for nothing—even my father, if you command me; but in the name of the all-powerful God, spare me my life—spare me my life!" he continued, crawling forward, and clutching at Fabian's knees.

"Arellanos also craved for mercy; did you listen to him?" said Fabian, turning away.

"But when I killed him, it was that I might

possess all this gold myself. Now I restore it all for my life—what can you want more?" he continued, while he resisted Pepé's efforts, who was trying to prevent him from kissing Fabian's feet.

With features distorted by excess of terror, a whitish foam upon his lips, his eyes starting from his head, yet seeing nothing, Cuchillo still sued for mercy, as he endeavoured to crawl towards Fabian. He had by continued efforts reached the edge of the platform. Behind his head the sheet of water fell foaming downwards.

"Mercy, mercy!" he cried, "in the name of your mother—for Doña Rosarita's sake, who loves you, for I know that she loves you —I heard ——"

"What?" cried Fabian, in his turn rushing towards Cuchillo, but the question expired upon his lips.

Spurned along the earth by the ex-carabinier's foot, Cuchillo, with head and arms stretched back, was hurled into the abyss!

"What have you done, Pepé?" exclaimed Fabian.

"The wretch," said the ex-carabinier, "was not worth the cord which might have hung him, nor the bullet that would have sent him out of the world."

A piercing cry,—a cry which rose from the abyss—which drowned their voices, and was heard above the roar of the cascade, caused Fabian to stretch his head forward, and withdraw it again in horror. Hanging to the branches of a shrub which bent beneath his weight, and which, scarce adhering to the sides of the rock, was fast giving way, Cuchillo swung over the abyss, howling forth his terror and anguish.

"Help!" he shouted, in a voice despair-

ing as the damned; "help, if you are human beings—help!"

The three friends exchanged a glance of unutterable meaning, as each one wiped the sweat from his brow.

Suddenly the bandit's voice grew faint, and amidst horrible bursts of laughter, like the shrieks of a lunatic, were heard the last inarticulate words that escaped his lips.

A moment after, and the noise of the cascade alone broke the silence of the desert. The abyss had swallowed up him whose life had been a long tissue of crimes.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN OF THE RED KERCHIEF.

Six months have elapsed since the three hunters, without deigning to carry with them a single grain of the treasures of the Valley of Gold, directed their steps, following the course of the Rio Gila, to the plains of Texas. The rainy had succeeded to the dry season, without anything being known of their fate, or of the expedition commanded by Don Estevan de Arechiza.

Diaz was no more, having carried with him

to the tomb the secret of the wonderful valley—and Gayferos had followed his three liberators. What had become of these intrepid hunters who had willingly encountered fatigues, privations, and dangers, instead of returning to civilized life? Were they as rich and powerful as they might have been? Had the desert claimed these three noble spirits, as it has done so many others. Like the monk, who seeks in the silence of the cloister forgetfulness of the world's vain show, had Fabian in the sublimity of solitude been able to forget the woman who loved him, and who secretly hoped for and expected his return?

What we are about to relate will answer these questions.

One sultry afternoon, two men, mounted and armed to the teeth, pursued the lonely road which leads from the utmost confines of the province of Sonora to the Presidio of

Tubac. Their costume, the coarse equipment of their steeds, and the beauty of the latter formed on the whole a striking contrast, and seemed to indicate subalterns despatched by some rich proprietor, either to carry or to seek information.

The first was clothed in leather from head to foot, like the vaquero of some noble hacienda; the second, dark and bearded like a Moor, though less simply attired than his companion, did not appear to be of much greater consideration.

At the end of a journey of some days, the white houses of the Presidio began to appear in the distance. The two cavaliers had probably exhausted every subject of conversation, for they trotted on in silence.

The scanty vegetation which covered the plains they were crossing was again becoming parched by the sun, after the winter rains;

and the dry grass harboured innumerable grasshoppers, whose shrill note was heard incessantly, mingled with the scorching breath of the south wind. The foliage of the Peruvian trees drooped languidly over the burning sand, like the willows upon the banks of a stream.

The two cavaliers arrived at the entrance of the Presidio just as the church clock sounded the evening *angelus*.

Tubac was then a village with two cross streets, its houses built of cement, with only a few windows in the front, as is the custom in places exposed to the sudden excursions of the Indians. Strong movable barriers, formed by trunks of trees, protected the four approaches to the village, and a piece of the artillery of the country, raised upon its carriage, was erected behind each of these barriers.

Previous to following the new-comers into the Presidio, we must relate an incident which, insignificant in itself, nevertheless acquired some importance in the heart of a solitary village like Tubac.

During the space of a fortnight a mysterious personage—inasmuch as he was unknown to the inhabitants of the Presidio—had frequently, and for a short time, appeared there. He was a man of about forty years of age, thin, but rough and vigorous in appearance; whose countenance seemed to tell of dangers overcome, but whose speech was as rare as his physiognomy was expressive. He replied shortly to any questions addressed to him; but, on the other hand, he asked a great many, and appeared particularly anxious to know what was passing at the Hacienda del Venado.

Some of the inhabitants of the Presidency

knew the rich proprietor very well by repute, but few amongst them—or, one might rather say, none of them—were so thoroughly acquainted with Don Augustin Peña as to be capable of answering the questions of the stranger.

Everybody in Tubac remembered the gold-seekers' expedition which had set out six months previously; and, according to some vague replies given by the mysterious personage, it was suspected that he knew more upon the matter than he chose to reveal. He had, he pretended, encountered in the deserts of the Apaches country a troop commanded by Don Estevan in a very critical position, and he had reason for believing that they must have fought a last and terrible engagement with the Indians, from the result of which he argued no good.

The evening before the arrival of the two

travellers, he had inquired what direction he ought to take to reach Don Augustin's house; and, above all, he had testified a great wish to learn whether Doña Rosarita was still unmarried.

The unknown always wore on his head a red chequered handkerchief, the folds of which hung down over his eyes; and in consequence of this head-dress he always went by the name of the "man with the red kerchief."

This being explained, let us now return to our two travellers.

The new comers—whose arrival created some sensation—on entering the presidency, directed their steps towards one of the houses in the village, at the door of which sat a man, who was soothing his leisure hours by playing upon the guitar.

One of the cavaliers, addressing him, said—

"*Santas tardes!* my master, will you

afford hospitality to two strangers for a day and a night?"

The musician rose and bowed courteously.

"Pray dismount, noble cavaliers," he answered, "this dwelling is at your service as long as you please to remain."

Such is the simple ceremonial of hospitality still in vogue in these distant countries.

The cavaliers dismounted from their horses, in the midst of an idle group who had collected around them, and who observed the two strangers with considerable curiosity—for in the Presidio of Tubac an arrival is a rare event.

The host silently assisted his guests to unsaddle their horses, but the more inquisitive of the crowd did not exercise so much discretion, and without scruple addressed a multitude of questions to the travellers.

"Good people," said one of the cavaliers,

"let us first attend to our horses, and afterwards, when we have taken a mouthful of food, we shall have a chat. My comrade and myself have come here for that very purpose."

Thus saying, the bearded cavalier unfastened his gigantic spurs, threw them across his horse's saddle, which he deposited, together with its woollen coverings carefully folded, in the piazza attached to the house.

The two strangers did not dwell long over their repast. They soon rejoined their host upon the threshold, and sat down beside him. Their questioners had not yet departed from the house.

"I am the more inclined," resumed the bearded traveller, "to inform you all of the object of our visit to the Presidio, since we are sent by our master to ask you a few questions. Will that be agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly," replied several voices; "and

first, may we know who your master is?"

"He is Don Augustin Peña; you are not without some knowledge of his name."

"The proprietor of the great Hacienda del Venado—a man worth three millions! Who does not know him?" replied one of the by-standers.

"He is the same. This cavalier, whom you see, is a vaquero, entrusted with the care of the beasts of the hacienda; for myself, I am a majordomo attached to the service of the proprietor. Would you have the kindness, my dear friend, to give me a light for my cigar?" continued the bearded majordomo.

He paused to light his cigar of maize husk, and then resumed.

"Six months ago an expedition set out from here in search of gold dust. This expedition was headed by one named—let me see

—*carrai!* I have heard him called by so many names, that I cannot remember any!"

"Don Estevan Arechiza?" replied one of the interlocutors; "a Spaniard, and one such as we do not often see in this country; one who seemed by his noble deportment and majestic countenance to have commanded all his life."

"Don Estevan Arechiza—the very same," said the majordomo; "a man who as far exceeds all others in generosity as a gamester who has just won a fortune. But let me return to the expedition; about how many men composed it, do you guess?"

"More than eighty started out with it."

"More than a hundred," suggested another.

"You are mistaken—the number was not a hundred in all," interrupted a third.

"That matters little to Don Augustin, my

master. It is far more important to know how many returned."

Upon this point also there were two different opinions.

"Not a single one," remarked a voice.

"Yes; there was one, and but one," continued another.

The majordomo rubbed his hands with an air of satisfaction.

"Good!" said he; "then at least one is saved, provided this gentleman, who declares that all the gold-seekers are not dead, be rightly informed, as I hope he is."

"Do you not think," said the last who had spoken, "that the man of the red handkerchief may not be one of those whose departure we witnessed six months ago? I would swear to it by the cross and the gospel."

"No! not so!" cried another; "that man

never set foot in the Presidio before the other day."

"In any case," interrupted a third, "the man of the red handkerchief has doubtless something of interest in store for Don Augustin Peña, since he has so often inquired about him. With these gentlemen he will probably be more communicative than with us."

"That will be just what we desire," resumed the majordomo.

"You must know, then, and I may without indiscretion inform you," continued he, "that Don Augustin Peña, whom God preserve, was the intimate friend of the Señor Arechiza, and that he has had no news of him for six months past, which would be natural enough if he has been massacred by the Indians with all the rest. But my master is anxious for his return, that he may marry his

daughter, Doña Rosarita, a beautiful and charming person, to the Senator Don Vicente Tragaduros. Months have elapsed, and since the hacienda is not on the main road from Arispe to Tubac, and that we cannot gain information from any one upon the subject of this deplorable expedition, Don Augustin determined upon sending us here to inquire about it. When he shall have established the fact that Don Estevan's return is impossible—and as young girls do not readily meet with Senators in the heart of the desert —nor do the latter often find there girls whose marriage portion is worth two hundred thousand piastres——"

"Carramba! that is a high figure."

"True, friend," continued the majordomo; "then the projected marriage will take place to the mutual satisfaction of all parties. Such is the object of our journey to Tubac.

If, therefore, you can conduct me to him whom you describe as the sole survivor of this expedition, we shall perhaps learn from him what we wish to discover."

The conversation had reached this stage, when, at some distance from the house where it was taking place, a man was seen passing, with his head bent downwards."

"See!" said one of the party, pointing to the man in question, "there goes your sole survivor."

"In truth, it is a person whose conduct is sufficiently mysterious," added the host. "For some days past he has done nothing but come and go, from one place to another, without informing any one of the object of his journeyings."

"If it please you, we shall question him?" proposed one.

"Hola! friend!" cried another of the

party, "come this way; here is a gentleman who is anxious to see and speak with you."

The mysterious unknown approached at the summons.

"Señor cavalier," said the majordomo, courteously addressing him, "it is not to gratify an idle curiosity that I now address you; but the master whom I serve feels a natural anxiety at the disappearance of a friend, whose death he would greatly deplore. What do you know of Don Estevan de Arechiza?"

"Many things. But pray what is the name of the master of whom you speak?"

"Don Augustin Peña—proprietor of the Hacienda del Venado."

A ray of joy lit up the countenance of the unknown.

"I am able," he said, "to furnish Don Augustin with all the information he may

desire. How many days' journey is it from hence to the hacienda?"

"Three days' journey with a good horse."

"I possess a capital one; and if you can wait for me until to-morrow evening, I shall accompany you, and communicate with Don Augustin in person."

"Be it so," answered the majordomo.

"Very well," added the man of the red handkerchief; "to-morrow at this same hour we will start, so that we may travel by night, and so escape the heat."

Saying this, he took his departure—when the majordomo remarked:

"It must be agreed, gentlemen, that nothing can exceed the complaisance of this cavalier of the red handkerchief."

The arrangement did not satisfy the by-standers, who were thoroughly disappointed; but their interest was renewed, on seeing the

man of the red handkerchief pass by on horseback, and depart at full speed towards the north.

The unknown kept his promise; and on the day following, he returned at the hour of the evening *angelus*.

Don Augustin's two envoys took leave of their host, assuring him of a kind welcome, if ever his affairs led him in the direction of the Hacienda del Venado. Even the poorest, in this primitive country, would blush to receive any other reward for hospitality than sincere thanks, and a promise that they in their turn should receive it.

The three horsemen set off at full speed; the horse of the unknown equalled in strength and mettle those of Don Augustin's envoys. The journey was rapidly accomplished; and at dawn of the third day, they could trace in the distance the clock tower of the Hacienda del

Venado, and an hour afterwards they dismounted in the courtyard. Although it was at that early hour when the sun sheds its most enlivening rays, everything which surrounded this habitation bore the stamp of melancholy. One might have supposed that the gloomy nature of its inmates was reflected upon its exterior.

Doña Rosarita was dying of grief; and this filled the haciendado with the deepest anxiety. Don Augustin's daughter could not help the belief that Fabian yet lived. But why, then, had not Tiburcio, as she always called him, returned to the hacienda? Either he was dead, or he no longer loved her! It was this uncertainty that gave rise to Doña Rosarita's deep dejection.

Another source of anxiety to the haciendado was the absence of all news from the Duke de Armada; and to this anxiety was added im-

patience. The projected marriage between Rosarita and the Senator had been devised by Don Estevan. Tragaduros had urged its fulfilment. Don Augustin had laid the proposal before his daughter; but she replied only by tears; and her father still hesitated.

However, at the expiration of six months, it was determined to put an end to the uncertainty by sending to the Presidio for information concerning the expedition commanded by Don Estevan. It was the last respite that poor Rosarita had ventured to demand.

The Senator had absented himself for some days from the hacienda, when the majordomo returned, and Don Augustin was informed of the arrival of a stranger who could remove his uncertainty. He ordered the stranger to be introduced into the chamber already known to the reader; and Doña Rosarita,

who had been sent for, speedily joined her father.

In a few moments the stranger presented himself. A wide felt hat, to which on entering he raised his hand without removing it, shaded his face, upon which a keen anxiety was visible. From beneath the broad brim of his hat a red handkerchief fell so low upon his forehead as almost to conceal his eyebrows, and from beneath its shadow he gazed with a singular interest upon the pale countenance of the young girl.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

Her head veiled by a silk scarf, which partly concealed the luxuriant tresses of her dark hair, as they fell in luxuriant clusters upon her bosom, Doña Rosarita's countenance gave evidence of long and secret suffering.

As she seated herself, a look of deep disquietude increased her paleness. It seemed as though the young girl feared the approach of a moment in which she might be required to renounce those sweet dreams of the past,

for the reality of a future she dared not contemplate.

When the stranger was also seated, the haciendado addressed him.

"We are indebted to you, my friend," he said, "for travelling thus far to bring us news, which I have been forwarned may prove of a very sad nature; nevertheless, we must hear all. God's will be done!"

"My news is in truth sad; but, as you say, it is necessary," and the stranger, laying a stress upon these last words, seemed to address himself more particularly to Doña Rosarita, "that you should hear all. I have been witness to many things yonder; and the desert does not conceal so many secrets as one might suppose."

The young girl trembled slightly, while she fixed upon the man of the red handkerchief a deep and searching glance.

"Go on, friend," said she, in her melodious voice, "we shall have courage to hear all."

"What do you know of Don Estevan?" resumed the haciendado.

"He is dead, Señor."

A sigh of grief escaped Don Augustin, and he rested his head upon his hands.

"Who killed him?" he asked.

"I know not; but he is dead."

"And Pedro Diaz—that man of such noble and disinterested feeling?"

"He, like Don Estevan, is no more of this world."

"And his friends, Cuchillo, Oroche, and Baraja?"

"Dead, as well as Pedro Diaz, all dead except—but with your leave, Señor, I shall commence my narrative at an earlier period. It is necessary that you should know all."

"We shall listen to you patiently."

"I need not detail," resumed the narrator, "the dangers of every kind, nor the various combats in which we were engaged since our departure. Headed by a chief who inspired us with boundless confidence, we shared his perils cheerfully."

"Poor Don Estevan!" murmured the hacendado.

"During the last halt, in which I was present, a report spread through the camp that we were in the vicinity of an immense treasure of gold. Cuchillo, our guide, deserted us; he was absent two days. It was doubtless God's will that I should be saved, since it inspired Don Estevan with the idea of sending me in search of him. He therefore commanded me to scour the country in the environs of the camp."

"I obeyed him, notwithstanding the danger of the mission, and went in search of our

guide's footsteps. After some time, I was fortunate enough to find his traces; when all at once I perceived in the distance a party of Apaches engaged in a hunt of wild horses. I turned my horse's head round as quickly as possible, but the ferocious yells which burst out on every side told me that I was discovered."

The stranger, in whom the reader has doubtless recognized Gayferos, the unfortunate man who had been scalped, paused an instant, as though overcome by horrible recollections. Then, in continuation, he related the manner in which he was captured by the Indians, his anguish when he thought of the torments they were preparing for him, the desperate struggle by which he kept up in his race against them with naked feet, and the inexpressible sufferings he endured.

"Seized by one of them," said he, "I was struck by a blow which felled me to the earth; then I felt the keen edge of a knife trace, as it were, a circle of fire around my head. I heard a gun fired, a ball hissed close to my ears, and I lost all consciousness. I cannot tell how many minutes passed thus. The sound of a second shot caused me to open my eyes, but the blood which covered my face blinded me; I raised my hand to my head, which felt both burning and frozen. My skull was bare, the Indian had torn off the hair with the scalp attached to it. In short, they had scalped me! That is the reason, Señor, that I now wear this red handkerchief, both by day and by night."

During his recital, a cold perspiration covered the narrator's countenance. His two listeners shuddered with horror.

After a momentary pause, he continued:—

"I ought perhaps to spare you, as well as myself, other sad details."

Gayferos then related to his auditors the unexpected assistance he had obtained from the three hunters, who had taken refuge upon the little island, and was describing the moment in which Bois-Rose carried him off in the presence of the Indians, when this heroic action drew from Don Augustin's lips a cry of admiration.

"But there were then a score on this little island?" interrupted he.

"Reckoning the giant who carried me in his arms, there were but three," continued the narrator.

"*Santa Virgen!* they were trusty men, then—but continue."

The adventurer resumed:—

"The companion of him who had carried me in his arms was a man of about the same

age—that is, near five-and-forty. There was, besides, a young man, of a pale but proud countenance, a sparkling eye, and a sweet smile; by my faith, a handsome young man, Señorita; such a one as a father might with pride own as a son—such as a lady might be proud and happy to see at her feet. During a short interval of calm which succeeded the horrible agonies I had suffered, I found time to question the preservers of my life concerning their names and occupation; but I could learn nothing from them, except that they were hunters, and travelled for their own pleasure. That was not very probable, still I made no observation."

Doña Rosarita could not quite suppress a sigh: perhaps she expected to be reminded of a familiar name.

Gayferos continued the recital of the

various facts with which the reader is already acquainted.

"Alas, Señorita," he continued, "the poor young man was himself captured by the Indians, and his punishment was to avenge the death of their companions."

At this part of the narrative, Doña Rosarita's cheek became deadly pale.

"Well, and the young man," interrupted the haciendado, who was almost as much moved as his daughter, on hearing these sad events, "what became of him?"

Rosarita, who had remained silent as the narrator proceeded, returned by a look of tender acknowledgment the solicitude her father testified for the young man, for whom, in spite of herself, she felt so deep an interest.

"Three days and three nights were con-

sumed in fearful anguish, relieved only by a feeble ray of hope. At length, on the morning of the fourth day, we were able, unawares, to fall upon our sanguinary foes; and, after a desperate struggle, the warlike giant succeeded in reconquering the youth, whom, safe and sound, he again pressed to his heart, calling him his beloved child."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the haciendado, with a sigh of relief.

Rosarita remained silent, but her colour suddenly returning, testified to the pleasure she experienced; while a joyous smile lit up her countenance on hearing the last words of the narrator.

"Continue," said the haciendado; "but in your recital, which is deeply interesting to a man who was himself, during six months, held captive by the Indians, I seek in vain for

any details relative to poor Don Estevan's death."

"I am ignorant of them," continued Gayferos; "and I can only repeat the words spoken by the youngest of the three hunters, when I questioned him upon the subject."

"He is dead," said the young man to me; "you yourself are the last survivor of a numerous expedition; when you shall have returned to your own country—for," added he, with a sigh, "you have, perhaps, some one who in grief numbers the days of your absence—they will question you concerning the fate of your chief, and the men he commanded. You will reply to them that the men died fighting—as to their chief, that he was condemned by the justice of God, and that the divine sentence pronounced against him was executed in the desert. Don Estevan

Arechiza will never again return to his friends."

"Poor Don Estevan!" exclaimed the haciendado.

"And you could never learn the names of these brave, generous, and devoted men?" asked Doña Rosarita.

"Not at the moment," continued Gayferos; "only it appeared strange to me that the youngest of the three hunters spoke to me of Don Estevan, Diaz, Oroche, and Baraja as though he knew them perfectly."

A pang shot through Doña Rosarita's heart, her bosom heaved, her cheeks were dyed with a deep crimson, then became pale again as the flowers of the *datura*, but she still remained silent.

"I draw towards the close of my recital," continued Gayferos. "After having recovered the brave warrior's son from the Apaches, we

journeyed towards the plains of Texas. I shall not relate to you all the dangers we encountered during six months of our wandering life, as hunters of the otter and the beaver, nevertheless it had charms; but there was one amongst us who was far from finding this life agreeable. This was our young companion.

"When I saw him for the first time, I was struck by the melancholy expression of his countenance; but afterwards, as we journeyed together, I noticed that this melancholy, instead of decreasing, seemed daily to augment. The old hunter, whom I believed to be his father (I know now that he is not), took every opportunity of calling his attention to the magnificence of the vast forests in which we lived, the imposing scenes of the desert, or the charm of the perils we encountered. They were vain efforts, for nothing

could banish the grief that consumed him. He seemed only to forget it in the midst of the dangers he eagerly sought. One might have supposed that life to him was no more than a heavy burthen which he desired to get rid of.

"Full of compassion for him, I often said to the old hunter—'Solitude is only suited to an advanced age—youth delights in activity, and in the presence of its equals. Let us return to our habitations.' But the giant only sighed, without replying.

"Soon afterwards the manner of the two hunters, who loved their young companion as a son, became also saddened.

"One night, whilst the young man and I were watching, I recalled a name which six months before he had uttered in his sleep. I then learned the secret of that grief which was slowly consuming him. He *loved*, and solitude

had but increased a passion which he vainly sought to stifle."

Gayferos paused an instant to cast a searching glance upon the countenances of his auditors, especially upon that of Doña Rosarita. He appeared to take a secret pleasure in exciting the young girl by a recital of all the circumstances best calculated to touch the heart of a woman.

As a warrior and a hunter, the haciendado did not attempt to conceal the interest with which the stranger's narrative was inspiring him.

Rosarita, on the contrary, endeavoured, under a mask of studied coldness, to conceal the charm she experienced on listening to this romance of heart and action, whose most stirring pages were so considerately opened to her by the intelligent narrator.

But her heightened colour, and the fire

in her large dark eyes, completely belied her efforts.

"Ah!" cried Don Augustin, "if these three brave men had been under Don Estevan's command, the fate of the expedition might have been far different."

"I am of the same opinion," replied Gayferos; "but God had ordained it otherwise. Meanwhile," he continued, "I felt a great longing again to see my native land, but gratitude required that I should conceal it. But the old warrior divined my thoughts, and one day addressed me on the subject.

"Too generous to suffer me alone to brave the dangers of my homeward journey, the giant hunter resolved to accompany me as far as Tubac. His companion did not oppose his resolution, and we set out for the frontier. The young man alone seemed to follow us reluctantly in this direction.

"I shall not describe our fatigues, and the various difficulties we surmounted in the course of our long and perilous journey. I wish, however, to speak of one of our last encounters with the Indians.

"In order to reach the Presidio, we were obliged to cross the chain of the Rocky Mountains. It was towards the approach of night that we found ourselves amongst their gloomy solitudes, and we were obliged to halt.

"This is a spot much frequented by the Indians, and we could not encamp without the greatest precaution.

"Nothing, as it seems to me, can better resemble the abode of condemned souls than these mountains, where we spent the night. At every moment strange sounds, which appeared to proceed from the cavities of the rocks, broke upon our ears. At one time it was a volcano which rumbled with dull and

heavy noise beneath us, or the distant roar of a cataract; sometimes resembling the howling of wolves or plaintive cries; and from time to time dreadful flashes of lightning tore aside the veil of mist which eternally covers these mountains.

"For fear of a surprise we had encamped upon a rock which projected, in the form of a table, above a wide open valley about fifty feet below us. The two elder hunters were asleep; the youngest alone kept watch. It was his turn, and as usual he had been compelled to insist upon it—for his companions seemed unwilling thus to allow him to share their toils.

"As for myself, sick and suffering, I was stretched upon the ground. After many vain efforts to obtain a little rest, at length I slept, when a frightful dream awoke me with a start.

"'Did you hear nothing?' I asked of the young man, in a low voice. 'Nothing,' he replied, 'except the rumbling of the subterranean volcanoes in the mountains.' 'Say, rather, that we are here in an accursed spot,' I continued and then I related my dream to him.

"'It is, perhaps, a warning,' he said, gravely. 'I remember one night to have had just such a dream, when——'

"The young man paused. He had advanced to the edge of the rock. I crawled after him mechanically. The same object arrested our attention at the same moment.

"One of those spirits of darkness which might have inhabited such a spot appeared suddenly to have acquired a visible form. It was a kind of phantom, with the head and skin of a wolf, but erect upon its legs, like a human being. I made the sign of the cross,

and murmured a prayer, but the phantom did not stir.

"'It is the devil,' I whispered.

"'It is an Indian,' replied the young man; 'there are his companions at some distance.'

"In short, our eyes, well practised in making out objects in the dark, could distinguish about twenty Indians stretched upon the ground, and who, in truth, had no idea of our vicinity.

"Ah, Señorita!" added the narrator, addressing himself to Doña Rosarita, "it was one of those opportunities fraught with danger which the poor young man sought with so much avidity; and your heart, like mine, would have been torn at beholding the sad joy which sparkled in his eyes; for the further we travelled in this direction the more his melancholy seemed to increase.

"'Let us wake our friends,' I suggested.

"'No; let me go alone. These two men have done enough for me. It is now my turn to run a risk for them, and, if I die, I shall forget——'

"As he spoke these words the young man quitted me, made a detour, and I lost sight of him—without, however, ceasing to behold the frightful apparition, which continued immovable in the same spot.

"All at once I saw another dusky shape, which rushed towards the phantom and seized it by the throat. The two forms grappled with one another. The struggle was short and noiseless, and one might have believed them two spirits. I prayed to God in behalf of the poor young man who thus exposed his life with so much indifference and intrepidity. A short time afterwards I saw him return; the blood was flowing over his face from a large wound on his head.

"'Oh, Heavens!' I cried; 'you are wounded.'

"'It is nothing,' he said; 'I will now wake our companions.'

"What do you think, Señorita?" continued the narrator. "Was not my dream a warning from God? A party of Indians, whom we had put to flight on the other side of the mountains, had followed our track in order to revenge the blood of their companions, which had been spilt upon the banks of the Gila—at the place where we had rescued the young man.

"But the Indians had to contend with terrible adversaries. Their sentinel was the phantom who had been killed by the courageous hunter before he had time to utter a cry of alarm, and the rest, surprised in their sleep, were nearly all stabbed; a few sought safety in flight.

"The night had not passed before this new exploit was accomplished.

"The tall hunter hastened to dress the wound of the young man, whom he loved as a son; and the latter, overcome with fatigue, stretched himself upon the ground and slept.

"In the meantime his two friends watched by his side to guard his sleep, whilst I, in sadness, contemplated his altered countenance, his reduced figure, and the blood-stained bandage with which his head was bound."

"Poor youth," interrupted Doña Rosarita, gently; "still so young, and yet compelled to lead a life of incessant danger. And his father also, he must have trembled for the life of a beloved son?"

"Beloved, as you say, Señorita," continued the narrator. "During a period of six months I was a daily witness to the infinite tenderness of this father for his child.

"The young man slept tranquilly, and his lips softly murmured a name—that of a woman—the same which had lately been revealed to me in his slumber."

Rosarita's dark eyes seemed to question the narrator, but her words expired upon her parted lips; she dared not utter the name her heart was whispering in her ears.

"But I encroach upon your time," continued Gayferos, without appearing to notice the young girl's agitation. "I draw towards the close of my narrative.

"The young man woke just as day began to dawn.

"'Comrade,' said the giant to me, 'go down yonder and count the dead which these dogs have left behind them.'

"Eleven corpses stretched upon the ground," continued Gayferos, "and two captured horses, attested the victory of these intrepid hunters."

"Let all due honour be given to these formidable men," cried Don Augustin, with enthusiasm; whilst his daughter, clapping her little hands together, exclaimed, with sparkling eyes, and an enthusiasm which equalled that of her father:—

"That is splendid! that is sublime! so young, and yet so brave."

Rosarita only lavished her praises upon the young unknown—though perhaps the acute perception which belongs to a woman, and which almost resembles a second sight, may have revealed to her his name.

The narrator seemed to appreciate the praises bestowed upon his friends.

"But did you not learn their names?" asked Doña Rosarita, timidly.

"The elder was called Bois-Rose, the second Pepé. As to the young man——"

Gayferos appeared to be vainly endeavour-

ing to recall the name, without remarking the anguish which was depicted in the young girl's agitated frame, and visible in her anxious eyes.

By the similarity of position between Tiburcio and the unknown, she could not doubt but that it was he; and the poor child was collecting all her strength to listen to his name, and not to utter, on hearing it, a cry of happiness and love.

"As to the young man," continued the narrator, "he was called Fabian."

At this name, which was unknown to the young girl, and which at once destroyed her pleasant delusions, she pressed her hand upon her heart, her lips became white, and the colour which hope had revived in her cheek faded away. She could only repeat mechanically,

"Fabian!"

At this moment the recital was interrupted by the entrance of a servant. The Chaplain begged the haciendado to come to him for an instant, upon some business he had to communicate to him.

Don Augustin quitted the apartment, saying that he should speedily return.

Gayferos and the young girl were now left alone; the former observed her some moments in silence, and, with a delight he could scarcely conceal, saw that Rosarita trembled beneath the folds of her silk scarf. By a secret feeling the poor child divined that Gayferos had not yet finished. At length the latter said gently:—

"Fabian bore another name, Señorita; do you wish to hear it while we are alone and without witnesses?"

Rosarita turned pale.

"Another name? oh, speak it!" she cried, in a trembling voice.

"He was long known as Tiburcio Arellanos."

A cry of joy escaped the young girl, who rose from her seat, and, approaching the bearer of this good news, seized his hand.

"Thanks! thanks!" she exclaimed, "if my heart has not already spoken them."

Then she tottered across the chamber, and knelt at the feet of a Madonna, which, framed in gold, hung against the wall.

"Tiburcio Arellanos," continued the narrator, "is now Fabian, and Fabian is the last descendant of the Counts of Mediana—a noble and powerful Spanish family."

The young girl continued on her knees in prayer, without appearing to listen to Gayferos' words.

"Immense possessions, a lofty name, titles and honours—all these he will lay at the feet of the woman who shall accept his hand."

The young girl continued her fervent prayer without turning her head.

"And, moreover," resumed the narrator, "the heart of Don Fabian de Mediana still retains a feeling which was dear to the heart of Tiburcio Arellanos."

Rosarita paused in her prayer.

"Tiburcio Arellanos will be here to-night."

This time the young girl no longer prayed. It was Tiburcio, and not Fabian, Count of Mediana—Tiburcio, poor and unknown, for whom she had wept. At the sound of his name she listened. Honours, titles, wealth! What were they to her? Fabian lived, and loved her still; what more could she desire?

"If you will come to the breach in the wall, where, full of despair, he parted from you, you will find him there this very evening. Do you remember the place?"

"Oh! my God!" she murmured, softly, "do I not visit it every evening?"

And once more bending before the image of the Virgin, Rosarita resumed her interrupted prayer.

The adventurer contemplated for some moments this enthusiastic and beautiful creature, her scarf partly concealing her figure, her nude shoulders caressed by the long tresses of her dark hair, which fell in soft rings upon their surface; then, without interrupting her devotion, he rose from his seat and silently quitted the chamber.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

When Don Augustin Peña returned, he found his daughter alone, and still kneeling; he waited until her prayer was finished. The news of Don Estevan's death so entirely occupied the haciendado's mind that he naturally attributed Doña Rosarita's pious action to another motive than the true one. He believed that she was offering up to Heaven a fervent prayer for the repose of his spirit, whose mysterious end they had just been made acquainted with.

"Every day," said he, "during the following year, the Chaplain will, by my orders, say a mass for Don Estevan's soul—for this man spake of the justice of God, which was accomplished in the desert. These words are serious, and the manner in which they were pronounced leaves no doubt as to their veracity."

"May God pardon him!" replied Rosarita, rising from her knees, "and grant him the mercy he requires."

"May God pardon his soul!" repeated Don Augustin, earnestly; "the noble Don Estevan was no ordinary man, or rather, that you may now know it, Rosarita, Don Antonio de Mediana, in his life-time, was Knight of the Grand Cross, and Duke de Armada."

"Mediana, did you say, my father?" cried the young girl; "what! he must then be his son?"

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Don Augustin, in astonishment; "Don Antonio was never married. What can you mean?"

"Nothing, my father, unless it be that your daughter is to-day very happy."

As she said these words, Doña Rosarita threw her arms round her father's neck, and, leaning her head upon his breast, burst into a passion of tears; but in these tears there was no bitterness, they flowed softly, like the dew which the American jasmine sheds in the morning from its purple flowers.

The haciendado, but little versed in the knowledge of the female heart, misconstrued the tears which are sometimes a luxury to women; and he could conceive nothing of the happiness which was drawing them from his daughter's eyes.

He questioned her anew, but she contented herself with answering, while her lips were

parted by a smile, and her eyes were still moist:—

"To-morrow I shall tell you all, my father."

The good haciendado did indeed require the explanation of this mystery, when he was left in ignorance of the chief fact concerning it.

"We have another duty to fulfil," continued he; "the last wish expressed by Don Antonio, on parting from me, was, that you should be united to the Senator Tragaduros. It will be in compliance with the request of one who is now no more, that this marriage should no longer be delayed. Do you see any obstacle to it, Rosarita?"

The young girl started at these words, which reminded her of the fatal engagement she had sought to banish from her memory. Her bosom swelled, and her tears flowed afresh.

"Well," said the haciendado, smiling, "this is another proof of happiness, is it not?"

"Of happiness!" repeated Rosarita, bitterly. "Oh! no, no, my father."

Don Augustin was now more puzzled than ever; for, as he himself alleged, his life had been spent more in studying the artifices of Indians, with whom he had long disputed his domain, than in diving into the hearts of women.

"Oh, my father," cried Rosarita, "this marriage would now prove a sentence of death to your poor child."

At this sudden declaration, which he had not expected, Don Augustin was quite stupefied, and it was with difficulty he subdued the anger to which it had given rise.

"What!" he cried, with some warmth, "did you not yourself consent to this marriage only a month ago? Did you not agree that

it should be consummated when we knew that Don Estevan could not return? He is dead; what then do you wish?"

"It is true, father; I did fix that period, but——"

"Well!"

"But I did not know that he still lived."

"Don Antonio de Mediana?"

"No, Don Fabian de Mediana," replied Rosarita, in a low voice.

"Don Fabian? Who is this Fabian of whom you speak?"

"He whom we called Tiburcio Arellanos."

Don Augustin remained mute with surprise —his daughter took advantage of his silence.

"When I consented to this marriage," said she, "I believed that Don Fabian was for ever lost to us. I did not know that he still loved me; and yet—consider whether I do not love

you, my father; consider what a grievous sacrifice I made in my affection for you—I knew well——"

As she spoke these words—her eyes moist with tears, yet shining with their own sweet lustre—the poor girl approached, and, by a sudden impulse, threw herself upon her father's shoulders to hide her rising blushes.

"I knew then that I loved him only," she murmured.

"But of whom do you speak?"

"Of Tiburcio Arellanos—of the Count Fabian de Mediana—they are one and the same person."

"Of the Count Mediana?" repeated Don Augustin.

"Yes," cried Rosarita, passionately; "I still love in him Tiburcio Arellanos, however noble, powerful, and rich may be at this hour Count Fabian de Mediana."

Noble, powerful, and rich are words that sound well in the ear of an ambitious father, when applied to a young man whom he loves and esteems, but whom he believes to be poor. Tiburcio Arellanos would have met with a refusal from Don Augustin—softened, it is true, by affectionate words—but had not Fabian de Mediana a better chance of success?"

"Will you tell me how Tiburcio Arellanos can be Fabian de Mediana?" asked Don Augustin, with more curiosity than anger. "Who gave you this information?"

"You were not present at the close of the stranger's narrative," replied Doña Rosarita, "or you would have heard that the young companion of the two brave hunters, whose dangers he nobly shared, was no other than Tiburcio Arellanos, now become the Count Fabian de Mediana. To this day I am

ignorant of how, alone and wounded, he quitted the hacienda, and by what circumstances he found these unexpected protectors —or what relationship exists between Tiburcio and the Duke de Armada. But this man who knows will tell you."

"Let him be instantly sought," said Don Augustin, quickly; and he called an attendant, to whom he gave the order.

Don Augustin awaited with the greatest impatience the return of Gayferos; but they sought him in vain. He had disappeared. We shall presently explain the motive of his departure. Almost at the same moment in which the haciendado and his daughter were informed of it, another attendant entered to announce that Tragaduros was dismounting in the courtyard of the hacienda.

The coincidence of the Senator's return with the approaching arrival of Fabian, was

one of those events in which chance, oftener than might be supposed, sports with the events of real life.

Rosarita, in order to secure an ally in her father, hastened to embrace him tenderly, and to testify her astonishment at a miracle which had converted the adopted son of a gambusino into the heir of one of the most powerful families in Spain. After having launched this twofold dart against the Senator, the young girl vanished from the apartment, leaving her father alone.

Tragaduros entered like a man who feels that the announcement of his arrival is always welcome. His manner was that of a future kinsman, for he had obtained the father's promise and the daughter's consent, although that consent was only tacitly given. However, notwithstanding his self-satisfaction, and his confidence in the future, the

Senator could not fail to remark the grave reserve of Don Augustin's manner. He thought himself at liberty to remark it.

"Don Estevan de Arechiza, the Duke of Armada, is no more," said the haciendado; "both you and I have lost a dear and noble friend."

"What, dead?" cried the Senator, hiding his face with an embroidered cambric handkerchief. "Poor Don Estevan! I do not think I shall ever be able to console myself."

His future, nevertheless, might not have been obscured by perpetual grief, for the regret he expressed was far from being in harmony with his most secret thoughts. While he acknowledged the many obligations he owed to Don Estevan, he could not help remembering that, had he lived, he would have been compelled to spend in political

intrigues the half of his wife's marriage portion; half a million of money he must thus have thrown to the dogs. It is true, he said to himself, I shall neither be a count, marquis, nor duke of any kind, but, to my thinking, half a million of money is worth more than a title, and will multiply my pleasures considerably. This fatal event will besides hasten the period of my marriage. Perhaps, after all, Don Estevan's death is not a misfortune. "Poor Don Estevan," he continued aloud, "what an unexpected blow!"

Tragaduros had yet to learn that it might have been better for him had Don Estevan lived. We will leave him with the haciendado, and follow Gayferos—for perhaps the reader will be glad to hear of him again.

The adventurer had saddled his horse, and, unseen by anybody, had crossed the plain and

again taken the road which led to the Presidio of Tubac.

The route which he followed for some time brought him in contact with few travellers; and when by chance some horseman appeared in the distance, Gayferos, as he passed him, exchanged an impatient salutation, but failed to recognize the one he sought.

The day was drawing towards a close, and it was at a late hour when Gayferos uttered a joyful exclamation on seeing three travellers advancing at a gallop.

These travellers were no others than the Canadian, Pepé, and Fabian de Mediana. The giant was mounted upon a strong mule, larger and more vigorous than the Mexican horses. Nevertheless, this animal was somewhat out of proportion with the gigantic stature of the rider.

Fabian and Pepé rode two excellent cours-

ers, which they had taken from the Indians.

The young man was greatly changed since the day when he arrived for the first time at the Hacienda del Venado.

Painful and indelible recollections had left their traces upon his pale and wasted cheeks, a few wrinkles furrowed his brow, though the brilliancy of his eye was heightened by the sorrowful reflection of the passion which consumed him. But perhaps, in the eyes of a woman, his pale and sickly appearance might render the young Count of Mediana still more handsome and interesting than was that of Tiburcio Arellanos.

Would not that countenance, ennobled by toil and travel, remind Doña Rosarita of the love for which she had every reason to feel proud and happy? Would it not tell of dangers overcome, and surround itself with a double halo of sacrifice and suffering?

As to the rough countenances of the hunters, sun, fatigue, and dangers of every kind had left them unchanged. If the hot winds had bronzed their skin, six months more of the adventurous life to which they were accustomed left no trace upon their sunburnt features.

They testified no surprise on seeing the gambusino, but a lively curiosity was depicted in the glance of each. A look from Gayferos, however, soon satisfied them. That look doubtless assured them that all was as they wished. Fabian alone expressed some astonishment on seeing his old companion so near the Hacienda del Venado.

"Was it in order to precede us here that you came to take leave of us near Tubac?" asked Fabian.

"Doubtless—did I not tell you so?" replied Gayferos.

"I did not understand you thus," said Fabian, who, without seeming to attach much importance to that which was said or done around him, relapsed into the melancholy silence which had become habitual to him.

Gayferos turned his horse's head round, and the four travellers continued their journey in silence.

At the expiration of an hour, during which Gayferos and the Canadian only exchanged a few words in a low tone, and to which Fabian, always absorbed in thought, gave no attention, the recollections of a past, not very remote, crowded upon the memory of the three travellers. They were again crossing the plain which extends beyond El Salto de Agua, and a few minutes afterwards they reached the torrent itself, which foams down perpetually between the rocks. A bridge, the same size as the former one, replaced that which had

been precipitated into the gulf below by those men who now slept their last sleep in the Valley of Gold, the object of their ambition.

The Canadian here dismounted.

"Now, Fabian," said he, "here Don Estevan was found; the three bandits (I except, however, poor Diaz, the terror of the Indians) were there. See, here are still the prints of your horse's hoofs—when he slipped from this rock, dragging you downwards in his fall. Ah! Fabian, my child, I can even now see the water foaming around you,—even now hear the cry of anguish I uttered. What an impetuous young man you then were!"

"That I no longer am," said Fabian, smiling sadly.

"Oh! no, at the present time your manner is imbued with the firm stoicism of an Indian warrior, who smiles at the tortures of the stake. In the midst of these scenes your

face is calm; yet I am convinced the recollections they recall to you must be harrowing in the extreme; is it not so, Fabian?"

"You are mistaken, my father," replied Fabian; "my heart resembles this rock, where, though you say so, I no longer trace my horse's hoofs; and my memory is mute as the echo of your own voice, which you seem still to hear. When, before suffering me to return and live for ever removed from the inhabitants of yonder deserts, you required as a last trial that I should again behold a spot which might recall old recollections, I told you those recollections no longer existed."

A tear dimmed the Canadian's eye, but he concealed it by turning his back to Fabian as he remounted his mule.

The travellers then crossed the bridge formed of the trunks of trees.

"Do you trace upon this moss which covers

the ground the print of my horse's hoofs when I pursued Don Estevan and his troops?" asked Fabian of Bois-Rose. "No! the dead leaves of the past winter have obliterated them—the grass which sprung up after the rainy season has grown over them."

"Ah! if I raised the leaves, if I tore up the grass, I should again discover their traces, Fabian; and if I searched the depths of your heart——."

"You would find nothing, I tell you," interrupted Fabian, with some impatience; "but I am mistaken," he added, gently, "you would find a reminiscence of childhood, one of those in which you are associated, my father."

"I believe it, Fabian, I believe it—you have been the delight of my whole life; but I have told you that I will not accept your sacrifice until to-morrow at this hour, when you shall have seen all—even the breach in the

old wall, over which you once sprung, wounded in body and spirit."

A shudder, like that of the condemned on seeing the last terrible instrument of torture, passed through Fabian's frame.

The travellers halted at length, in that part of the forest situated between the Salto de Agua and the hacienda, in the open space where Fabian had found, in the Canadian and his comrade, friends whom God seemed to have sent to him from the extreme ends of the earth.

Now the shades of night no longer obscured the silent depths of the American forest —a silence in which there is something awful when the sun in its zenith sends forth burning rays, like blades of crimson fire, when the flower of the lliana closes its chalice, when the stems of the grass drop languidly downwards, as though in search of nourishment,

and the whole face of nature, silent and inanimate, appears buried in sleep. The distant roar of the cataract was the only sound which at this hour broke the stillness of the forest.

The travellers unsaddled, and having removed their horses' bridles, fastened them at some distance off. As they had travelled all night to escape the heat of the sun, they determined to take their siesta under the shade of the trees.

Gayferos was the first who fell asleep. His affection for Fabian was not disturbed by any fears for the future. Pepé was not long in following his example. The Canadian only and Fabian did not close their eyes.

"You are not sleeping, Fabian," said Bois-Rose, in a low voice.

"No, nor you. Why do you not take some rest, like our companions?"

"One cannot sleep, Fabian, in a spot con-

secrated by so many sacred memories," replied the old hunter. "This place is rendered holy to me. Was it not here that, by the intervention of a miracle, I again found you in the heart of this forest, after having lost you upon the wide ocean? I should be ungrateful to the Almighty if I could forget this—even to obtain the rest which he has appointed for us."

"I think as you do, my father, and listen to your words," replied the young Count.

"Thanks, Fabian; thanks also to that God who ordained that I should find you with a heart so noble and so loving. See! here are still the remains of the fire near which I sat; here are the brands still black, though they have been washed by the rain of an entire season. Here is the tree against which I leant on the happiest evening of my life, since it restored you to me; for now that I can

again call you my son, each day of my existence has been fraught with happiness, until I learnt what I should have understood, that my affection for you was not that to which the young heart aspires."

"Why so frequently allude to this subject, my father?" said Fabian, with that gentle submission which is more cutting than the bitterest reproach.

"As you will. Let us not again allude to that which may pain you; we shall speak of it after the trial to which I have submitted you."

The father and son—for we may indeed call them so—now maintained a long silence, listening only to the voices of nature. The sun approached the horizon, a light breeze sprung up and rustled among the leaves; already hopping from branch to branch, the birds resumed their song, the insects swarmed

in the grass, and the lowing of cattle was heard in the distance. It was the denizens of the forest, who welcomed the return of evening.

The two sleepers awoke.

After a short and substantial repast, of which Gayferos had brought the materials from the Hacienda del Venado, the four travellers awaited in calm meditation the hour of their great trial.

Some time passed away before the azure sky above the open clearing was overcast.

Gradually, however, the light of day diminished on the approach of twilight, and then myriads of stars shone in the firmament, like sparks sown by the sun as he quitted the horizon. At length, as on that evening to which so many recollections belonged, when Fabian, wounded, reached the wood-rangers by their fire, the moon illumined the sum-

mits of the trees and the glades of the forest.

"Shall we light a fire?" inquired Pepé.

"Certainly; for it may chance that we shall spend the night here," replied Bois-Rose. "Is not this your desire, Fabian?"

"It matters little to me," replied the young man; "here or yonder, are we not always agreed?"

Fabian, as we have said, had long felt that the Canadian could not live, even with him, in the heart of towns, without yearning for the liberty and free air of the desert. He knew also that to live without him would be still more impossible for his comrade; and he had generously offered himself as a sacrifice to the affection of the old hunter.

Bois-Rose was aware of the full extent of the sacrifice, and the tear he had that morning shed by stealth was one of gratitude.

We shall by-and-by enter more fully into the Canadian's feelings.

The position of the stars indicated eleven o'clock.

"Go, my son," said Bois-Rose to Fabian. "When you have reached the spot where you parted from the woman who perhaps loved you, put your hand upon your heart. If you do not feel its pulses beat quicker, return, for you will then have overcome the past."

"I shall return, then," replied Fabian, in a tone of melancholy firmness; "memory is to me like the breath of the wind which passes by without resting, and leaves no trace."

He departed slowly. A fresh breeze tempered the hot exhalations which rose from the earth. A resplendent moon shone upon the landscape at the moment when Fabian, having quitted the shadow of the forest, reached

the open space intervening between it and the wall enclosing the hacienda.

Until that moment he proceeded with a slow but firm step; but when, through the silver vapours of the night, he perceived the white wall, with the breach in the centre partly visible, his pace slackened, and his knees trembled under him.

Did he dread his approaching defeat?—for his conscience told him already that he would be vanquished—or was it rather those recollections which, now so painfully recalled, rose up before him like the floods of the sea?

There was a deep silence, and the night, but for a slight vapour, was clear. All at once Fabian halted, and stood still like the dismayed traveller who sees a phantom rise up in his path. A white and airy form appeared distinctly visible above the breach in the old wall. It resembled one of the fairies in the

old legends of the north, which, to the eye of the Scandinavian idolaters, floated amidst vapours and mist. To the eye of Fabian it bore the angel form of his first and only love!

For one instant this lovely apparition appeared to Fabian to melt away; but his eyes deceived him, for in spite of himself they were obscured. The vision remained stationary. When he had strength to move he advanced nearer, and still the vision did not disappear.

The young man's heart felt as if it would burst, for at this moment a horrible idea crossed his mind. He believed that what he saw was Rosarita's spirit, and he would rather a thousand times have known her living, though pitiless and disdainful, than behold her dead, though she appeared in the form of a gentle and benignant apparition.

A voice, whose sweet accents fell upon his ear like heavenly music, failed to dispel the

illusion, though the voice spoke in human accents.

"Is it you, Tiburcio?—I expected you."

Even the penetration of a spirit from the other world could not have divined that he would return from such a distance.

"Is it you, Rosarita?" cried Fabian, in a scarcely perceptible voice, "or a delusive vision which will quickly disappear."

And Fabian stood motionless, fixed to the spot, so greatly did he fear that the beloved image would vanish from his sight.

"It is I," said the voice; "I am indeed here."

"O God! the trial will be more terrible than I dared to think," said Fabian, inwardly.

And he advanced a step forward, then paused; the poor young man did not entertain a hope.

"By what miracle of heaven do I find you here?" he cried.

"I come every evening, Tiburcio," replied the young girl.

This time Fabian began to tremble more with love than hope.

We have seen that Rosarita, in her last interview with Fabian, chose rather to run the risk of death than confess that she loved him. Since then she had suffered so much, she had shed so many tears, that now love was stronger than virgin modesty.

A young girl may sometimes, by such courage, sanctify and enhance her purity.

"Come nearer, Tiburcio," she said; "see! here is my hand."

Fabian rushed forward to her feet. He seized the hand she offered convulsively, but he tried in vain to speak.

The young girl looked down with anxious tenderness upon his face.

"Let me see if you are much changed, Tiburcio," she continued. "Ah! yes. Grief has left its traces on your brow, but honour has ennobled it. You are as brave as you are handsome, Tiburcio. I learned with pride that danger had never made your cheek turn pale."

"You heard, did you say?" cried Fabian; "but what have you heard?"

"All, Tiburcio; even to your most secret thoughts. I have heard all, even of your coming here this evening? Do you understand? —and I am here!"

"Before I dare to comprehend, Rosarita— for this time a mistake would kill me," continued Fabian, whose heart was stirred to its very depths by the young girl's words, and the tenderness of her manner—"will you

answer one question—that is, if I dare to ask it?"

"Dare, then, Tiburcio," said Rosarita, tenderly. "Ask what you wish. I came to-night to hear you—to deny you nothing."

"Listen," said the young Count; "six months ago I had to avenge my mother's death, and that of the man who had stood in my father's place, Marcos Arellanos; for if you know all, you know that I am no longer——."

"To me you are the same, Tiburcio; I never knew Don Fabian de Mediana."

"The wretch who was about to expiate his crime—the assassin of Marcos Arellanos—in short, Cuchillo—begged for his life. I had no power to grant it; when he cried, 'I ask it in the name of Doña Rosarita, who loves you, for I heard——,' the suppliant was upon the edge of a precipice. I would have par-

doned him for love of you; when one of my companions precipitated him into the gulf below. A hundred times, in the silence of night, I recalled that suppliant voice, and asked myself in anguish, What did he then hear? I ask it of you this evening, Rosarita."

"Once, once only, did my lips betray the secret of my heart. It was here, in this very spot, when you had quitted our dwelling. I will repeat to you what I then said."

The girl seemed to be collecting all her strength, before she dared tell the young man that she loved him, and that openly and passionately; then—her pure countenance shining with virgin innocence, which fears not, because it knows no ill, she turned towards Tiburcio.

"I have suffered too much," said she, "from one mistake, to allow of any other; it is thus, then, with my hands in yours, and my

eyes meeting yours, that I repeat to you what I then said. You had fled from me, Tiburcio. I knew you were far away, and I thought God alone heard me when I cried: '*Come back, Tiburcio, come back! I love only you!*'"

Fabian, trembling with love and happiness, knelt humbly at the feet of this pure young girl, as he might have done before a Madonna who had descended from her pedestal.

At this moment he was lost to all the world —Bois-Rose, the past, the future—all were forgotten like a dream on awaking, and he cried in a broken voice:

"Rosarita! I am yours for ever! I dedicate my future life to you only."

Rosarita uttered a faint cry. Fabian turned, and remained mute with astonishment.

Leaning quietly upon his long carbine, stood Bois-Rose, a few paces from them, contemplat-

ing, with a look of deep tenderness, the two lovers.

It was the realization of his dream in the isle of Rio Gila.

"Oh, my father!" cried Fabian, sadly, "do you forgive me for suffering myself to be vanquished?"

"Who would not have been, in your place, my beloved Fabian?" said the Canadian, smiling.

"I have broken my oath, my father!" continued Fabian; "I had promised never to love any other but you. Pardon! pardon!"

"Child, who implores pardon?—when it is I who should ask it," said Bois-Rose; "you were more generous than I, Fabian. Never did a lioness snatch her cub from the hands of the hunters, and carry it to her den, with a more savage love than I dragged you from the habitations of men to hide you in the desert.

I was happy, because all my affections were centred in you; and I believed that you might also be so. You did not murmur; you sacrificed, unhesitatingly, all the treasures of your youth—a thousand times more precious than ithose of the Golden Valley. I did not intend t should be so, and it is I who have been selfish, and not generous, for if you had died of grief, I should have died also."

"What do you mean?" cried Fabian.

"What I say, child. Who watched over your slumbers during long nights, to hear from your lips the secret wishes of your heart? It was I. Who determined to accompany to this spot Gayferos, whom at your intercession I saved from the hands of the Apaches? Who sent him to seek this beautiful and gracious lady, and learn if in her heart she still treasured your memory? It was I still, my child, for your happiness is a thousand times more

precious than mine. Who persuaded you to make this last trial? It was still I, my child, who knew that you must succumb to it. To-morrow I had said to you, I will accept your sacrifice, but Gayferos had even then read the most secret pages of this lady's heart. Why do you ask my pardon, when I tell you it is I who should ask yours?"

The Canadian, as he finished these words, opened his arms to Fabian, who eagerly rushed into his embrace.

"Oh, my father," cried he, "so much happiness frightens me, for never was man happier than I."

"Grief will come when God wills it," said the Canadian, solemnly.

"But you, what will become of you?" asked Fabian, anxiously. "Your loss will be to me the only bitterness in my full cup of joy."

"As God wills, my child," answered the Canadian. "It is true I cannot live in cities, but this dwelling, which will be yours, is on the borders of the desert. Does not infinity surround me here? I shall build with Pepé——Ho, Pepè!" said the hunter in a loud voice, "come and ratify my promise."

Pepé and Gayferos came forward at the hunter's summons.

"I and Pepé," he continued, "will build a hut of the trunks and bark of trees upon the spot of ground where I found you again. We shall not always be at home, it is true; but perhaps some time hence, should you wish to claim the name and fortune of your ancestors in Spain, you will find two friends ready to follow you to the end of the world. Come, my Fabian, I have no doubt that I shall be even happier than you; for I shall experience

a double bliss in my happiness and yours."

But why dwell longer upon such scenes? —happiness is so transitory and impalpable, that it will not bear either analysis or description.

"There remains but one obstacle now," resumed the hunter. "This sweet lady's father."

"To-morrow he will expect his son," interrupted Rosarita, who stood by, listening with singular interest to the dialogue.

"Then let me bless mine," said the Canadian.

Fabian knelt before the hunter.

The latter removed his fur cap, and with moist eyes raised to the starry heavens, he said—

"Oh! my God! bless my son, and grant that his children may love him as he has been loved by his old Bois-Rose."

* * * * *

The following day the illustrious Senator returned in sadness to Arispe.

"I was sure," he said, "that I should unceasingly mourn for poor Don Estevan. I might at least have possessed, besides my wife's marriage portion, a title of honour and half a million of money. It is certainly a great misfortune that poor Don Estevan is dead."

Some time afterwards, a hut made of the bark and trunks of trees was built in the forest glade so well known to the reader. Often Fabian de Mediana, accompanied by Rosarita, to whom he was now united by the holy ties of marriage, performed a pilgrimage to the dwellers in the hut.

Perhaps at a later period one of those pilgrimages might be undertaken with the view of claiming the assistance of the two brave hunters in an expedition to the Golden Valley, or to the coast of Spain; but that is a thing

of the future. Let us for the present be content with saying, that if the happiness of this world is not a vain delusion, in truth it exists at the Hacienda del Venado, enjoyed by Fabian, Rosarita, and the brave *Wood-Rangers*,—Pepé and Bois-Rose.

THE END.

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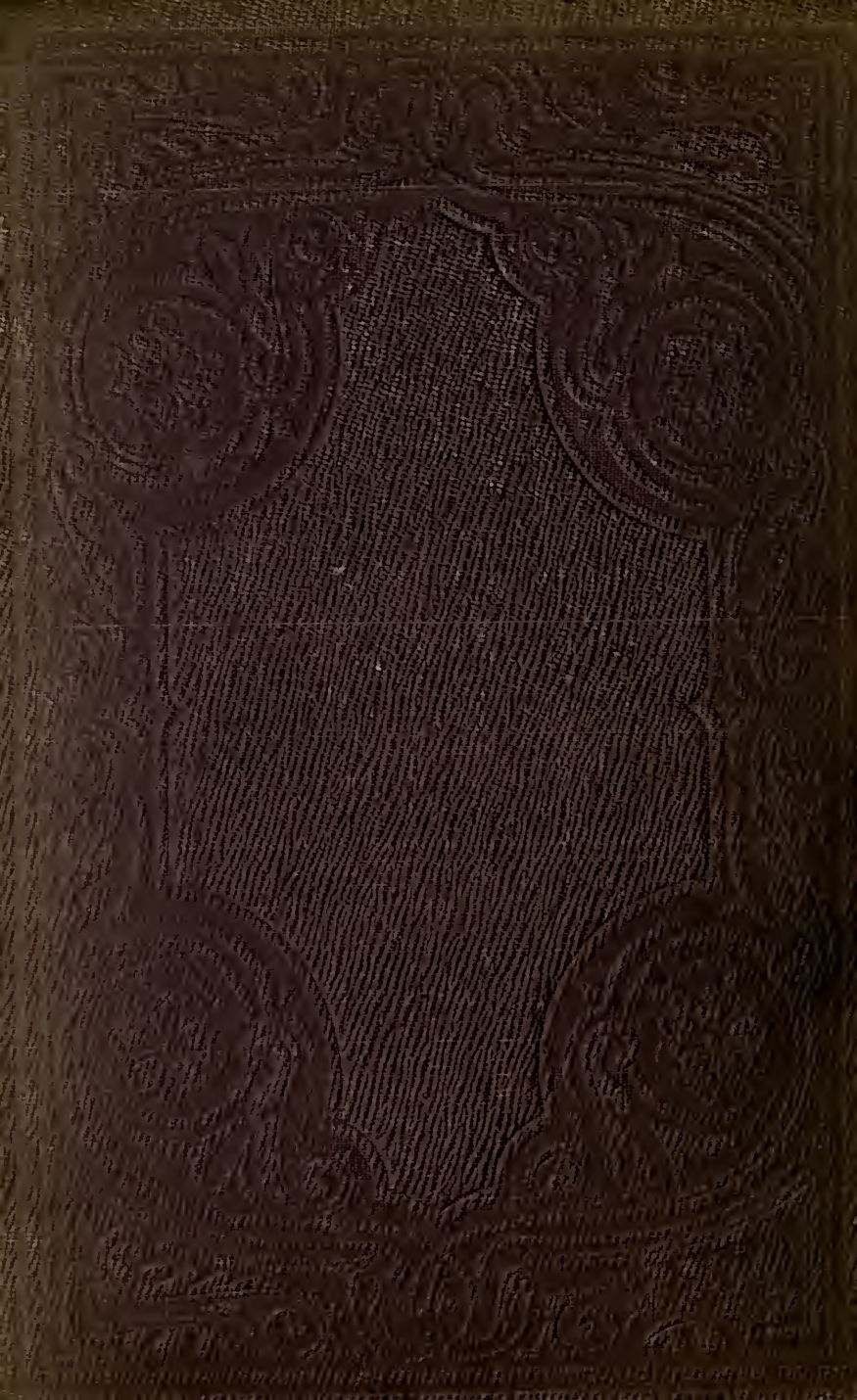
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